The **future** of **electronic entertainment** issue#107

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Atari Special Edition:
past, present and fut
Previewed: FFXI, Turok
Evolution, Riding Spirits
The making of Popul
Reviewed: FFX, Maxim
Super Mario Advance
Medal of Honor: Allied
Assault, Frequency, Az



A legend returns

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A legend returns

From homespun enterprise to household name to videogaming oblivion. Atari's journey has been one blessed with some of the highest peaks and damned by the lowest troughs.

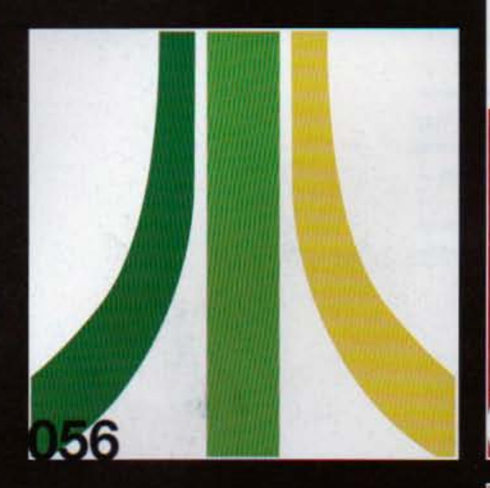
Conveniently, you'll find these in **Edge**'s retrospective on the US softco (p56) but this month's main focus can be found 12 pages earlier: what is Infogrames planning to do with what is arguably the world's most recognisable (not prestigious, note) videogaming brand? Hopefully, it should mark a departure for the licence-reliant publisher, providing it with an opportunity to erase past errors while also finally gaining the respect of the hardcore crowd. While some are quick to condemn – even, dismiss – the French publishing giant, **Edge** prefers to adopt a more open-minded approach. Certainly, the Atari name is unlikely to reach the dizzy heights it once enjoyed but the potential of (almost all of) the games currently selected to carry the brand can not be ignored – Infogrames is serious about its objective.

It's a comforting start to 2002, a year that marks the legitimate start of the next chapter in the 'Sony vs Microsoft vs Nintendo' saga.

It seems appropriate, then, that this month sees the introduction of a new **Edge** editor. If you're a regular reader you'll know from past experience this doesn't signify a radical departure from the magazine's strict remit – **Edge** will continue to evolve, naturally, and you should hopefully agree that subsequent alterations enhance, rather than diminish, the publication. It also seems a suitable time to again thank you for your continued support – knowing there are a substantial number of like-minded individuals out there makes a frequently difficult job that little bit easier.

If you haven't held this magazine in your hands before, then welcome aboard – we like to think that what we lack in exclamation mark usage and false exclusivity claims we make up for in unrivalled, honest analysis and a genuine attempt at bringing you the finest, most interesting elements from the videogaming community on a (near) monthly basis.

Features











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the 'here we go again' issue















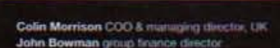




Prescreen

Regulars

Testscreen



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"Don't look at me, look at the road – that's how accidents happen!"


ROM


Photography: Martin Thompson

Murder on the high street

As the UK games market reaches a new high and retailers' sales soar, Edge asks, have the large chains become too powerful for the good of publishers and developers?

A turbulent year for the UK games industry was redeemed by the Christmas sales figures, which promise better times ahead in 2002. Sales of videogames, consoles and other leisure software for 2001 reached an all-time high of over £1.6 billion, up 36 per cent on 2000, according to ELSPA, the European Leisure Software Publishers Association. Over four million consoles and 47 million units of software were sold during the year. Much of this rise was attributed to the launch of Game Boy Advance and the mid-year price cut for PlayStation2, which now has a UK installed base of over 1.7 million. The original PlayStation had an installed base of 700,000 at the same stage of its lifecycle.

The total value of console hardware sold in the UK during 2001 jumped 121 per cent to £567 million, while console software rose 26 per cent to £711 million. The volume of PC software sold rose by ten per cent, although the value of sales remained steady at £346 million, reflecting the strength of the budget sector.

EA's *Harry Potter* topped the Christmas software chart. It sold over 300,000 units in five weeks, making it the fastest selling game of the year. Other titles labelled platinum by ELSPA, signifying sales of over 300,000, included *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Gran Turismo 3*.

Specialist retailer Electronics Boutique, which consists of EB and GAME stores in the UK and Ireland, posted particularly impressive figures. Sales were up 51 per cent in the five weeks to December 29 2001. Cumulatively, total sales for 2001 were up by 41 per cent. EB didn't release any specific figures but analysts predict it will report pre-tax profits of £25 million. Its turnover for the year ending January 31 was £307 million.

"The remarkable sales of PlayStation2 consoles and the coming launch of Microsoft's Xbox will further stimulate our market in the coming year. Since Christmas, demand for videogames to meet the needs of the newly installed console base has continued at record levels. A golden era has begun," commented **Peter Lewis**, EB's non-executive chairman.

The chain also announced it will be rebranding all its European stores, located in the UK, Ireland, Spain, France and Sweden, under the GAME name. The group's corporate name will change to The Game Group. Ironically, Electronics Boutique bought the GAME chain in May 1999 for £99 million. The company estimates the name change will cost around £6 million. Electronics Boutique operates from 290 stores in the UK and Ireland, of which around 190 are EB stores, as well as over 100 concessions with Debenhams and Sainsburys. It has around 150 stores and franchises in Europe.

Profits at the UK retail division of Dixons, which includes PC World and Currys, increased three per cent to £72.9 million. Sales were up three per cent to £1.9 billion. This weakness was blamed on the decline of the mobile phone and PC markets. Sales at the 106 PC World stores grew five per cent to £581 million, despite a 17 per cent decline in the PC market.

The downside

While game sales figures are sparkling, concern within the industry over the power exercised by some retail chains is mounting, however. This is particularly acute at the

> Retailers screw people for an awful lot of money. They won't take your product if you don't go in the catalogue but it costs £10,000 to go in



Saved By The Net?

With the large bricks-and-mortar chains controlling retail channels, many publishers and developers are looking for alternatives. And while online retailing has been extensively over-hyped, there are signs that it is becoming a valuable tool, particularly for niche products, or those with dedicated fans.

An example of the latter can be seen in the online sales of *Championship Manager 01/02*. "We have spent a lot of time and money investing in the fanbase, and our Website is hugely popular," explains Sport Interactive's MD **Miles Jacobson**. As part of a co-sponsorship deal with kit company Umbro, Sports Interactive forwarded all online sales through Umbro's Website. The result was that an impressive 13 per cent of the 103,000 sales clocked up during the first weekend were online. "The game continues to sell online, but at a much slower rate and mainly to people outside the UK who have had problems buying it locally. We have also had good sales on our merchandise range, the Prima strategy guide and *CM Quiz*," Jacobson reveals.

Jon Silvera, MD of publisher FastTrak had a similar experience selling home programming package *Dark BASIC* through Amazon. "I think people still have an incredible reservation to placing orders through the Internet, but *Dark BASIC* was Amazon.co.uk's top non-gaming title for six weeks," he says. "We sold about 1,500 units online, which was about two-thirds of what retail did in that period. That's one outlet compared to 300 to 400 shops."









Last year's best sellers included (from top) *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and *WWF Smackdown!* – all big licences



Electronics Boutique (not pictured), recently renamed GAME, announced record results after a buoyant Christmas, but is its impressive grip on the videogame market bad news?

present point in the industry cycle, because retailers generate revenue from selling new hardware. Publishers, and hence developers, have to wait until console installed bases are substantial enough to support large software volumes until they start to make money.

Calling the shots

"Retailers have publishers over a barrel. They definitely call the shots," explains a source at one large publisher. "There will be a load of sales guys who are struggling with their figures and having to put up with the big [retail] buyers saying, 'If you don't take back the stock I ordered at Christmas, then I'm not taking anything else off you for the rest of the quarter'," says another industry figure. "Retailers have the power to do that. They screw people for an awful lot of money. They won't take your product if you don't go in the catalogue but it costs £10,000 to go in the catalogue."

It's estimated that it costs publishers around £50,000 to launch an average title through the retail channel, including in-store marketing materials and shelf space. For example, the price to get a product into a new release bay for two weeks across a single chain is around £5,000. "The likes of EA don't sniff at that sort of money but for me that's a percentage of my revenue that I have to be cautious about," says a marketing source at a small publisher. "We can't always afford to get a product in store, which I find quite painful. And while it's got better over the past year, the amount of money some retailers were asking for to get a product in was almost offensive."

"They definitely try to exert too much influence," bemoans another studio head. "Unfortunately most publishers bow to the pressure. It would only take someone to stand up to them and say, 'Either take it on these terms or don't bother stocking it,' before the balance of power shifted. I'd love someone to put in an advert, 'Not available at these games shops' if they weren't happy with the pricing."

Of course, with this issue, perhaps above all others, no developers or publishers are prepared to put their names in print for fear of the commercial consequences. Retailers hold the purse strings of the industry, literally. In contrast, the 700-odd independent game retailers in the UK talk about little else than the price advantages and exclusive deals enjoyed by the chains. "Publishers do as they are told by the major retailers. A supplier will always be dictated to by its major purchaser, that's a fact of life," confirms **Chris Ratcliffe**, editor of the indie bible, 'Game Guide'.

"Had not the publishers bent over backwards to please the multiples in the early days when independents accounted for virtually 100 per cent of the market, they would not be in a position of having to concede to their demands, no matter how commercially unrealistic," concurs **Clive Bishop**, CEO of the National Association of Specialist Computer Retailers, a 200-strong

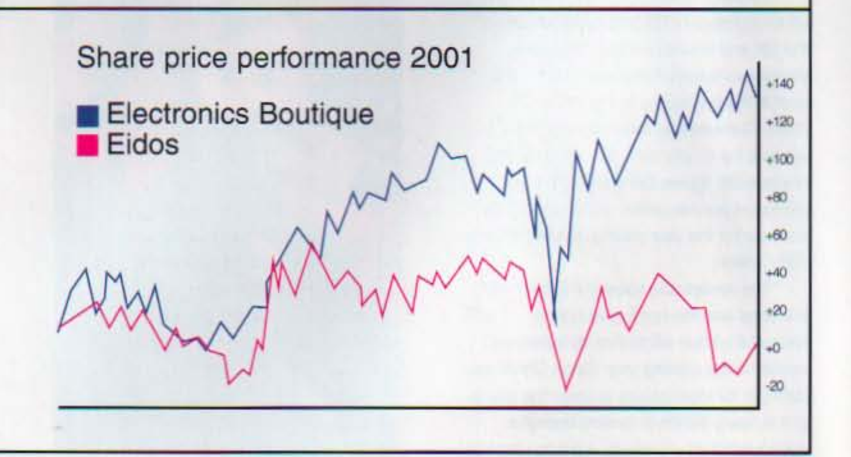
Chart Attack

One of the most bewildering retail arguments that erupted in 2001 was the battle over the weekly sales charts. Compiled by ChartTrack, from the daily sales of 5,000 game retailers in the UK and Ireland, at the start of the year, the weekly chart listed the positions and the sales total of the biggest selling games. The 18 companies which made up the ChartTrack retail panel also receive more detailed sales information, such as their market share data, broken down to the level of per console, per publisher and even per game title.

However, in March, it was announced that the form of the weekly charts was to be revised as one panel member, later revealed as Electronics Boutique, was unhappy with the amount of information being released. "It was felt that the chart was too fast and too accurate and that other retailers were using it as a buying guide," explains one source. "Now the weekly chart goes out without the actual sales figures. These are released together at the end of the month." To many outsiders, it seemed like a storm in a teacup, but it also demonstrated the ferocious level of competition which exists between retailers.

EB Share Prices

The relative performance of the share price of retailers compared to other sectors of the industry gives a graphic indication of their strength in 2001. Shares in Electronics Boutique rose from 56p to 131p between January 5 2001 and 2002, making it one of the best performers on the London stock exchange. In contrast, shares in the UK biggest publisher Eidos fell from 210.5p to 189p over the same period, while publishers Rage and SCi also experienced falling equity prices, with SCi's price collapsing from 277.5p to 82p. Developer Argonaut shares were steady, rising from 60p to 61p.





organisation. "What's frightening is that without the courage to stand up to the multiples' demands, the publishers' futures are also threatened."

One recent example of how serious the problem has become arose with Ubi Soft's release of *Rayman Advance* on the Game Boy Advance. Strangely, considering the high profile nature of the title, it wasn't stocked in any EB stores. This was because, according to Ubi Soft, the price demanded by the chain would have resulted in it losing money on each unit sold. Other publishers are reportedly experiencing similar problems with EB, specifically over its attitude towards GBA software.

A dirty kind of war

But whatever the differences between publishers and retailers, at least there is the underlying consensus that co-operation is the best course of action for both parties. In contrast, a low-level civil war is being played out across the UK's high streets between the independent game retailers and the chains. For example, it has been alleged that when one retail chain finds it has a store in direct competition with a well-run local indie, it provides its manager with specific instructions designed to drive that indie out of business. Rumours also persist that some of the larger chains can obtain such good deals from publishers that they order far more stock than they can possibly sell in order to improve their overall market share and standing with publishers. The extra stock is then sold on at a small premium to over-stockists.

One of the most contentious and long-running issues however is selling games before the official release dates. Individuals on both sides of the indie divide act as agent provocateurs to try and gain proof their rivals are breaking the rules. Linked to this, is the issue of grey imports. The sourcing of cheaper but genuine stock from unofficial channels, is widespread in many industries, as underlined by the ongoing legal battle between UK supermarket Tesco and Levi over jeans sourced from the US.



In terms of the UK games industry, grey imports arise from the availability of cheaper European stock. "In Europe, publishers may have different organisations handling their sales and especially if they are working through distributors, they will have no control over where product goes once it's in the hands of the distributor," explains Chris Ratcliffe. "Everyone's out to make money, so if a sale comes, they will sell. In many cases the price differential between the UK and Europe makes it quite attractive financially," he says. "Microsoft has said it is going to change this with Xbox. I cast some doubt on this because you can't sell a full price game in Greece for the same price as you can in the UK so I expect it to break down pretty quickly. And when it does, the grey importers will be the first to exploit it."

Grey imported games can be anything between 75p to £5 cheaper than officially sourced units. In the face of competition from multiples, which are supplied with cheaper stock because of their buying power, many independent stores feel that grey imports are one way they can try to level the playing field. Chris Ratcliffe sees it as an unavoidable symptom of the current system of game distribution and retailing. "If we rethought the way distribution was done in this country, there would be no need to buy greys," he claims. "I don't understand why a mature industry like games should have grey imports."

View From An Indie

Computer Exchange (CeX) is the UK's largest second-hand computer and videogames chain, with ten stores mainly in the south of the England. **Jonathan Cronin** is the group's marketing manager.

Has 2001 been a good year for CeX?
2001 has been a great year for CeX with sales up 40 per cent. Our strong year-on-year performance became even better in December.

Do you think there is a level playing field for independent game shops compared to the larger chains?
No. Independent specialists provide a superior offering to gamers. CeX will (where humanly possible) demo games for customers so they can try before they buy. Our staff have a knowledge that comes from being gamers themselves and we offer generous exchange values on customers' old games to lower the cost of new software.

Do you think the likes of EB/Game and Dixons have too much power in the UK market?
Massive multiples will always have some scale advantages, but CeX is more in touch with gamers' and computer users' needs. This helps us stay one step ahead of the chains and gives our customers an alternative choice to the chains.

Why do you think a strong independent segment is important for the overall health of the UK games market?
Supermarkets and general retailers will never be able offer the range of titles, formats and knowledge that a specialist games retailer can offer. CeX's combination of new and second-hand games plus our exchange model opens up gaming to wider audience. CeX offer gamers the opportunity to enjoy more new releases at lower cost by exchanging in their old titles.





(From top) *Denki Blocks*; David Bishop, Sky's game development manager; and Adrian Pilkington, Sky's head of games

A new way to play

Gaming through interactive television provides a growing opportunity for developers with content for the 'lean back' audience

Although it's taken longer than its proponents predicted, gaming via interactive television (iTV) finally appears to have become a financially-viable option for developers. As the most recent figures from BSkyB demonstrate, simple games such as *Tetris* and *Pipemania* are now generating millions of plays. The satellite TV giant relaunched its digital interactive service, Sky Active, in October, since when its game portal, Gamestar, has been visited by 3.5 million unique players, with over 1.5 million games being played per week.

"This is a 'lean back' rather than a 'lean forward' audience," explains **David Bishop**, Sky's games development manager. "Some traditional gaming franchises, while being enormously successful on PlayStation2 or PC, may be inappropriate for an iTV audience. Anything that feels like an adjunct to traditional TV viewing has a good chance of succeeding because that's what iTV gaming is all about."

"Games developers should treat iTV as a serious platform because it brings games to a huge and previously untapped audience," adds **Adrian Pilkington**, Sky's head of games. "It's immensely satisfying because development times are short, costs are low and the feedback we get is instantaneous. Also, there's money in it for the developers who hold quality games titles and licences." Although BSkyB fulfils the role of distributor and publisher for Gamestar, all its content has been developed by external companies.



After the success of *Denki Blocks*, released on Gamestar eight weeks before retail, the Cartoon Network is the first branded game channel to launch within the Gamestar portal

"We had Denki Blocks live in 5.5 million homes eight weeks before its Game Boy Advance retail launch. This established the brand far quicker and more directly than any marketing campaign"





Simple yet addictive games are the order of the day for iTV audiences. Current options for BSkyB users include *Beehive Bedlam* and *Battleship* (pictured above) and various quizzes

Around two thirds of the games on Gamestar are free to play. Additional options such as high score tables, which are often linked to competitions, typically involve a 50–75p per minute phone call, however. This creates an additional revenue stream for developers, who own their intellectual property. Several UK studios have been quick to exploit these opportunities. Most notable is Runecraft, which negotiated the European iTV licence for *Tetris* from Henk Roger's Blue Planet. It took 21 days for the game to clock up one million plays. Since March 2001 it has been played over four million times.

Others at the forefront include Empire, whose *Pipemania* game has topped one million plays and Rage's *Denki Blocks*. "iTV offers a new platform for developers to market their titles on," stresses Pilkington. "We had *Denki Blocks* live in 5.5 million homes eight weeks before its Game Boy Advance retail launch. This established the brand far quicker and more directly than any marketing campaign." BSkyB has signed an agreement with Team 17 for an iTV version of *Worms* as well, which is expected for release early in 2002.

At present 16 games are offered through the Gamestar portal, which are grouped in genres such as puzzles and quizzes. The first branded games channel, Cartoon Network, has recently launched, with the first offerings including *Flintstones* and *The Powerpuff Girls* games. BSkyB is also looking to capitalise on its strength in the sport market, especially football.

"TV channels are getting excited about the power of iTV games. They see games as a great way of extending their channel brands and supporting their programming, so we're going to see a mixture of traditional games and TV brands in the iTV games space," predicts Pilkington. "It's going to be fantastic."

Interactive TV content provider Two Way TV is focusing on the commercial possibilities of the media too. Its pay-to-pla[y] *Fruity4some* game is the first head-to-head multiplayer game to be provided through a[n] iTV service. The turn-based Connect4-clon[e] allows players to challenge remote opponents in realtime through NTL's cable network, which is a rival to BSkyB satellite operation.

"The addition of head-to-head capabilit[y] gives our games even greater appeal. It als[o] helps build a stronger sense of player community," says **Matthew Tims**, Two Way TV chief executive. "It's a significant step forward for interactive games and we see it as the first of many head-to-head games to be added to the Two Way TV channel."

Game on for Big Three

Sony stays on top despite Xbox and GameCube exceeding expectations as the new year brings news of record game sales

After the pre-Christmas chest beating between Microsoft and Nintendo regarding their respective next-generation gaming hardware, the holiday period turns out to have been a lucrative one for nearly everyone in the games industry. All three console manufacturers exceeded their sales expectations while consumers snapped up record volumes of software. The stellar performance of the market's new entrants is another example of the cyclical nature of the industry, as yet again a new generation of hardware seems to have ushered in an upward market cycle, as well as expanding the total size of the market.

Bill Gates used his keynote speech at the Consumer Electronics Show, in Las Vegas, to divulge that Microsoft sold 1.5 million Xbox units before the end of 2001, making the most of its three-day advantage over Nintendo, which reported North American sales of 1.2 million consoles in a similar period. Microsoft also boasted a better software ratio than its Kyoto-based competitor, with consumers purchasing three games for every Xbox sold, compared to only 2.6 games bought for every GameCube. Despite both companies announcing sales figures that exceeded expectations though, Sony's more established PlayStation2 sold 2.5 million units in North America over the same period, taking the company to global sales of 23 million units since the console's launch.

These figures suggest that the market may yet be large enough to support all three consoles. Certainly each company is confident of meeting their global sales projections for the year; 20 million PlayStations and 4.5 million GameCubes by the end of March, and 6 million Xbox units by the end of June.

Though it wasn't all plain sailing, press reports suggesting a rash of faulty Xbox units proved to be overstated, while a rumoured shortage of PS2s in the UK in January simply attests to Sony's massive commercial success.

Indeed in the UK, holiday sales of software pushed the market up to a record £1.6 billion according to ELSPA, and helped retailer Electronics Boutique to its best ever financial results. Which, with Xbox and GameCube set for release later this year, can only be a good thing, despite the chart superiority of *WWF Smackdown!*, *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.







Impressive sales figures are backed up by some stunning examples of next-gen quality, such as (from top) *Halo: Combat Evolved*, *Rez*, and *Super Monkey Ball*

CUTTINGS



More than one ring to rule them
After the box office triumph of Peter Jackson's 'The Lord of the Rings' movie' Electronic Arts will be releasing a tie-in thirdperson adventure title later this year, to coincide with the movie sequel. But in case that's not enough to keep Tolkien completists happy, Vivendi's Universal Interactive will also be releasing two titles based on the books themselves.

A thirdperson adventure for Xbox based on 'The Fellowship of the Ring' and an isometric RPG for Nintendo's GBA based on 'The Fellowship of the Ring' and 'The Two Towers' are currently in development. Each company plans to release further titles across next-gen platforms, with Universal also aiming to develop a massively multiplayer version.

Dreamcast not finished yet
With one or two titles still scheduled for release on the platform this year, there's still a chance to pick up a DC as distributor Bigben Interactive has announced a new retail bundle to join its £99 'Ultimate Dreamcast Pack'. The new bundle, which costs £69.99, consists of a console and a copy of either *Virtua Fighter 3tb* or *Jet Set Radio*.

AvP 2 mod tools released
Fox Interactive and developer Monolith have released mod tools for *Aliens Versus Predator 2*. The 8.73Mb download is available from www.fileplanet.com, and includes Talon's world-building tool DEdit and the model editing utility Model Edit, as well as extensive documentation and importers for 3Dstudio Max and Maya.

Kingston gets interactive
Telecommunications company Kingston interactive has unveiled a new games and entertainments service over its ADSL interactive TV service. The company's 10,000 subscribers in Hull and East Yorkshire will be able to enjoy the three titles that are initially available for free: *Dreamsquad Fantasy Football*, *Pac Mania* and *Beeze Bubble*.

Broadband pledge
In case four million subscribers and 330 thousand concurrent users weren't enough, Korean company NCsoft has teamed up with broadband software provider, BroadJump, to boost uptake of its online title, *Lineage: The Blood Pledge*. BroadJump's software will make it easier to buy and download the game, which is good news for executive producer, Richard Garriott, ex-Lord British of *Ultima Online* fame.







Photography: Martin Thompson

Nintendo to unveil GameCube launch plans at Milia 2002

GameCube may yet go head to head with Xbox in Europe, as Nintendo chooses the World's Interactive Content Marketplace to reveal strategy

GameCube on Display

Nintendo has released a tentative list of the GameCube titles that will be on display at Milia, which includes the following:

Playable



Luigi's Mansion
Super Smash Bros Melee
Pikmin
Wave Race: Blue Storm
StarFox Adventures
Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader
FIFA World Cup 2002
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3
Sonic Adventure 2
(and *Sonic Battle* on GBA)
Batman Vengeance
Virtua Striker 3
Pro Evolution Soccer 2002
Eternal Darkness
NBA Courtside 2002



Non-playable
Metroid Prime
Resident Evil GCN
Turok: Evolution
Soul Calibur 2

After what feels like an interminable wait, Nintendo finally looks set to reveal its plans for the European launch of the GameCube. The company has revealed that it is set to make an announcement at Milia 2002, which will take place in Cannes, at the Palais des Festivals from February 4–8. The move comes after months of media speculation that the launch would take place as late as September, and offers the clearest indication so far that European consumers may yet be able to get their hands on a PAL console as early as March this year.

David Gosen, Nintendo's European managing director of sales and marketing, and **Stephan Bole**, managing director of Nintendo France will host the press conference at midday on February 5, but attendees will also be able to get their hands on a range of playable GameCube software at the company's stand.

Significantly, *Eternal Darkness* and *StarFox Adventures* are currently listed as titles that will be playable at Milia, despite slipping from the company's official release schedule. Also pencilled in for display will be a non-playable demo of the hotly awaited *Metroid Prime* currently in development at troubled US developer, Retro Studios, though it's not known whether this will be the same demo that was shown at last year's E3 in Los Angeles.

"The best development studios around the world are now working on Nintendo GameCube," commented Bole. "For its first appearance at Milia, we felt it important to present right from the launch a broad range of games featuring unrivalled originality and quality." Whether this means that GameCube will be accompanied by a greater number of launch titles than has historically been the case in Europe will have to wait further elaboration. But in a tantalising hint as to the eventual launch date, Nintendo's press release seems to indicate that the unit will be released "just a few weeks" after Milia. If true, it looks likely that GameCube will soon be competing head to head with Xbox, as it did with much success in the US.

Although this is good news for gamers, doubts have already been raised, with some pundits suggesting that the initial European launch will be limited to a run of only 200,000 units or so. **Edge** is more concerned that an early launch will leave retailers and thirdparty publishers with little time to prepare for the launch, handing a sizeable advantage to Microsoft.

As an official media partner of Milia, **Edge** will have further news of the Nintendo announcement next issue, as well as a full report from the exhibition itself, which will also feature the Game Developer Village, New Talent competition, and Think.Tank summit.





If nothing else, Nintendo's announcement looks likely to give attendees something to talk about in seafront watering holes



Despite recently slipping from Nintendo's release schedule, both *Eternal Darkness* (left) and *StarFox Adventures* (formerly *SFA: Dinosaur Planet*, right) will apparently be playable

President of Nintendo of America Steps Down

News of the Milia announcement coincided with the release of a statement revealing that Minoru Arakawa has stepped down as president of Nintendo of America. During his 22-year tenure, Arakawa-san oversaw the launches of successive generations of Nintendo hardware, including the massively popular NES, which established the Nintendo brand as synonymous with videogaming in the US. He was also allegedly responsible for naming the company's mascot after the landlord of the company's US offices, Mario Segali. He will be succeeded by Tatsumi Kimishima, previously president of Pokémon USA.



Playing Fields closes doors

Market recovery doesn't arrive soon enough to save the popular Internet gaming café, which closed its doors last month

Despite unprecedented sales volumes over Christmas, the new year didn't bring good cheer to everyone involved in the games industry. Having opened its doors in April 1997, The Playing Fields, a popular London Internet gaming café, was forced to close earlier this year. News of the closure was posted on the company's Website, which also hosted a statement from Kroll Buchler Phillips, the joint liquidators of the company, stating that a creditors' meeting was to be held on January 29, 2002. Should additional funding or a new owner not be forthcoming, the company will simply cease to exist.

Over the course of its life, the venue proved to be popular with both gamers and games companies keen to promote forthcoming titles. Highlights included the recent *Sudden Strike* UK Championships – preserved for posterity by Channel 4's 'Thumb Bandits' – the *Unreal Tournament* Launch Party, and, according to co-founder **Edward Watson**, the last World Cup, for which all PCs were converted into TVs to watch England's matches. The venue also recently hosted two nights aimed specifically at female gamers, which were a huge success.

Talking to **Edge** about the closure, Watson explained that the recovery of the gaming market simply didn't arrive soon enough. "A common misconception is that our primary revenue stream was from selling time on our computers to gamers. Actually our primary and most important streams came from the promotion of computer games, be it games launches, off site parties, computer games tournaments and Websites. The downturn in marketing spend by computer games companies hit us really badly last year and our cash reserves weren't sufficient to survive to take advantage of a recovery that seems already to be happening this year."

He went on to thank well wishers. "Charles [Allen] and I apologise if it takes us a bit of time to reply to the literally hundreds of emails of condolence that we have received."

Any parties that are seriously interested in buying the company or its assets, should contact Kroll Buchler Phillips via www.playingfields.co.uk.





Among the many highlights of the Playing Fields' existence were the two ladies' nights, shown pictured above. Unless an investor is found, the venue will have to close down

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty	PS2	Konami	In-house	8
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	PC	Ubi Soft	Red Storm	8
Battle Realms	PC	Ubi Soft	Liquid Entertainment	7
Dead or Alive 3	Xbox	Microsoft	Tecmo (Team Ninja)	7
Dropship	PS2	SCEE	In-house	7
Shin Sangokumusou (Dynasty Warriors 3)	PS2	Koei	In-house	7
SSX Tricky	PS2/GC/Xbox	EA	EA Canada	7
Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader	GC	LucasArts	Factor 5	7
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	PS2	Activision	Neversoft	7
Return to Castle Wolfenstein	PC	Activision	id Software	6
Smash Brothers DX	GC	Nintendo	HAL Laboratories	6
James Bond 007 In Agent Under Fire	PS2	EA	In-house	5
MotoRacer 3	PC	EA	Delphine	5
Dark Summit	Xbox	Radical Entertainment	THQ	2



Ghost Recon: a bit like *Operation Flashpoint* lite. No bad thing



Dead or Alive 3 sticks to a tested formula, but it's still a lot of fun



Building on the successes of its predecessor is *Dynasty Warriors 3*



Stunning visuals elevate *Rogue Leader*'s mundane gameplay

CUTTINGS



Metal Gear Solid 2 gets closer to Xbox

PAL gamers will now have to wait until March 8 to get their hands on a copy of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. Publisher Konami has delayed the title from its original European launch date of February 22 owing to high demand from retailers, who are demanding a first day shipment of one million units. There will be some compensation though, in the shape of extra play modes and a free DVD containing a behind the scenes documentary which features an interview with Hideo Kojima himself. Presumably it's mere coincidence that the title will now ship a week before the European launch of Xbox, though the release of the PlayStation2 title may clear the way for news of the rumoured Xbox version to emerge.

Codemasters brings PC shooters to PS2

UK publisher Codemasters has signed up a couple of PC firstperson shooters for release on PlayStation2. The 18-rated *Soldier of Fortune – Gold* (PC version reviewed **E**84) and *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force* (PC version reviewed **E**90) will both be available on Sony's hardware this April. More information can be found on the company's revamped Website (www.codemasters.com) which now features a new subscribers-only section called Code M. The new service is free to subscribe, and members will benefit from exclusive playable demos and downloads of the latest games, as well as competitions and news.

Street Fighter goes wireless

The latest big name videogame licence to receive the wireless treatment is Capcom's *Street Fighter*. WAP and SMS versions of the longstanding beat 'em up franchise are currently in development at UK codeshop, Warthog, and will be distributed across Europe by THQ Wireless, early this year. THQ has also announced a partnership with Sprint in the US, the country's fastest growing wireless network operator. A number of titles are in development for the company's 3G handsets, including *WWF Mobile Madness*, *MotoGP*, and several titles dating back to the days of the Intellivision, such as *Astromash*.





Currently a work in process, Vulcan expects to release its first tech demo for the Mother engine in Q2 2002

The DIY ethos reborn

www.vulcan.co.uk
www.vulcan-portal.co.uk
www.mother3d.co.uk
www.valhalla-online.co.uk

The benefits of developing a game with highly-focused proprietary technology are immense, according to Vulcan Software

The trend within game development is for generic, middleware technology. It's not something that appeals to Vulcan Software's **Paul Carrington**. "The only advantage [with middleware] is the speed we could develop a 3D game," he remarks. "It would come with many disadvantages. The main one being we would end up with just another game using a 'seen it before' technology."

There's nothing remarkable in this attitude *per se*, it's shared by plenty of programmers. What makes it interesting, however, is that middleware was designed with the likes of Paul Carrington in mind. A veteran of the halcyon days of Amiga development, the transition to the PC proved to be a difficult one for the studio he founded in 1994. "The Amiga market died and we stood on the pier and waved at all of the other software developers setting sail on that big PC ship," Carrington recalls wryly.

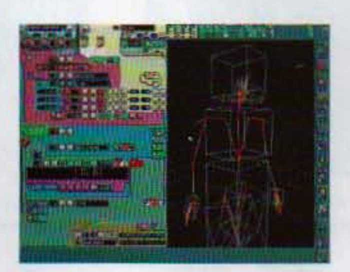
Still, he had an idea for a new game. Based on Vulcan's *Valhalla* series, Carrington's aim was to bring the universe into 3D via an episodic firstperson adventure game. "We needed to create a believable world – a game that would captivate a player's imagination and offer total immersion into confined locations," he says.

Yet with no programming experience of 3D PC graphics and no cash to buy in an existing engine, it seemed to be the end of the road. Instead of admitting defeat, the team decided to do it the hard way. "In a way having no funds was a godsend," reckons Carrington. "Being forced to write a 3D engine from scratch allowed us to get a thorough grip of all that was required and create tools that offered some unique functions."



The ongoing result is Vulcan's Mother technology. Based around a 3D realtime engine, it's now grown to encompass modelling, animation, environment creation as well as integrated camera, lighting, textures and sound editors. There are some more bizarre tools, too, such as the Mother Smell Editor. "This allows areas of a world to adopt a smell, with strength and decay values which will be later used by the AI of character-based models," Carrington explains.

The reason the technology can support such rich features – it also handles more conventional ones such as lip-synching – is that the Mother engine relies on a proprietary file format, called .mot. As well as defining a model's basic 3D structure, this contains extra data such as weights, rotation limits, friction and even an early attempt at AI mobility nodes. "The breaking down of all elements into a precise file format allows the designer to concentrate on the creation process of worlds knowing that the engine is exclusively designed to use them collectively," says Carrington.



Control over the creation process means that Mother characters can deal with lip-synching and realtime skinning

There's still some way to go, though. "We expect to have the bulk of the work completed along with the first tech demo of *Valhalla 3D* available around Q2 2002," he predicts. As for the issue of whether Carrington feels his approach goes against the grain of conventional wisdom, he's unconcerned. "We are aware that our technology is narrow in the sense that it dictates the construction of a Mother world that only uses Mother models and was constructed with Mother tools. But studying this narrow field of vision shows a diverse, reusable and generic approach to 3D game creation," he counters. "And at the end of the day, Mother is simply a tool. The only question is, 'Is it the right tool for the job?'"

AI on the fly

One of the key definers of Vulcan's integrated Mother pipeline and the .mot file format is the opportunity for unscripted artificial intelligent. As well as being defined by physical parameters such as geometry, centre of gravity, etc, labels such as 'drinkable' can also be attached to objects. In this way, a thirsty character can navigate its way to a drink, without the action being predefined. "Obviously if there was no coffee in the cup or it was too hot, this would dictate a new direction for any AI but at least the designer didn't need to worry about the finding, picking up and drinking of coffee," says Paul Carrington. "Simply there was a coffee cup model present and our character was thirsty."







Vulcan Software's Mother technology has grown from being a realtime game engine into a complete development tool dealing with model animation, lighting effects, textures, camera, sound, and even in-game smells via the Mother Smell Editor

Telling a brand new story

www.ihobo.co.uk/
www.geocities.com/scriptmonkeys

Improving the quality of game design, characters and scripts is the goal for consultancies such as International Hobo and Script Monkeys





Mike Anderiesz points to the well constructed narrative of *Max Payne* (above) and the dialogue of the *Monkey Island* series (below left) as the future of interactive gaming

The quality of game characters and plots have often criticised for being juvenile but there are signs that things are slowly beginning to change. One of the most obvious is the growing number of companies springing up to provide assistance in non-technical services such as game design, scripts and dialogue.

Game journalist **Mike Anderiesz** is the latest person to try and ease these growing pains with his startup Script Monkeys. "I basically launched the company out of despair," he says. "I'd been a games fan and journalist since the early '80s, and realised there was this massive medium with little in the way of quality original writing and a massive potential audience being ignored (girl gamers and the over 30s). I wanted to do something about it."

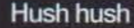
Chris Bateman, of game design and dialogue scripting company International Hobo, agrees. "Why shouldn't plot and character matter in an interactive medium?" he asks. "Games can allow us to explore both plot and character in ways that a strictly linear medium can never achieve. It's just that until recently we haven't had the confluence of talent in design and scripting working in the same place. Now that dialogue between games designers and script writers has begun, advanced interactive narratives are definitely on the horizon."

But while many developers agree with such sentiments in theory, it's a different matter when it comes to handing over cash or control of something as fundamental as game design to an outside company. "I think there's a general misunderstanding as to what an external design company does," says Bateman. "Many developers have more than enough talent and experience to get started, but not the time to construct, modify, evolve and maintain the design documentation to the level required for a modern triple-A game."

Script Monkeys offers a free script audit service for games to help try and overcome this inertia. "We take an existing game and hopefully demonstrate how it might be improved by script alone," Anderiesz explains. Few companies have taken up the offer however. "Most still seem to think it makes sense to spend half a million pounds on a 3D engine and then cobble together a few clichés for the storyline," he complains.

"Great design requires time to evolve," points out Bateman. "Most games don't get this luxury. It's a shame because design is not hugely expensive but naturally everyone is trying to keep their costs down." While these growing pains continue, at least they provide evidence the industry is moving in the right direction.

Hush hush



One of the biggest problems for companies such as International Hobo and Script Monkeys is they are rarely allowed to talk about the games they have been involved with, especially before they are released. In contrast, it's far more fashionable to talk about buying in technological expertise.

One game International Hobo can mention though is Empire's forthcoming PlayStation2 horror movie direction title *Ghost Master*. "We have been working on this for three years now," says Chris Bateman. "The current version of the design document totals 150,000 words – around the length of a large novel. But we can't say too much about the game itself until the main PR phase begins." Another project in the works is an original game concept in conjunction with Creature Labs.





Empire's *Ghost Master* (top) will be the first fruit of International Hobo's game design, with the current design document running to 150,000 words

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE



Ninty boys tremble: Christmas card or compelling evidence in a Rare multiformat conspiracy theory?





The Namco kids have Christmas in a festive car park. Well, you've got to make an effort, haven't you?



Lego's seasonal plans for genetically engineering a master race of evil block-children proceeded apace





3ft high and rising: the Miyamoto inspired daisy-age shot at the J hit parade improved sales of *Pikmin*

01 Christmas card cheer

UK: Although **Edge** is always delighted to receive seasonal messages of goodwill over the Christmas period, in truth, there were some truly awful images spread around the office this year. A special mention must go to the Lego card with its depiction of too-angelic-they-must-be-demon-spawn children smiling out into space. In terms of quality it was no real surprise that Rare (again) came in first place with some splendid original artwork to showcase its games for 2002. The familiarly proportioned gifts under the Christmas tree was also a clever way of announcing a move to multi-format development. Climax's image of stockinged cyberbabes was as cheesy as they come. But surely the lascivious hand-holding was a touch OTT. (Do these artists have nothing better to do?) And in third, Namco's stylised *Time Crisis II* card, complete with reluctant hero wearing a red-nose, made a pleasant change from the traditionalist opposition.

02 Plucky chart topper

UK: Back in 1978 *Space Invaders* spawned its own special alien line dance which was the craze of Tokyo's nightclubs. Fast forward to 2002 and *Pikmin* is causing its very own music craze in the east. 'Ai no uta' ('Song of Love') by Strawberry Flower is based on the vibrant Nintendo game and, at the time of writing, is currently number 2 in the Japanese charts. The success is even more phenomenal considering that the single was not expected to enter the charts and the game had been selling relatively poorly. However, sales of Miyamoto-san's gardening-inspired game have now picked up and it is currently selling in excess of 300,000 units per week. Let's just hope THQ don't get big ideas to try a similar tactic with its *Smackdown!* franchise.

Soundbytes

"When I got baack [sic] from my Christmas holidays I found I had email to the effect that, basically, although the aforementioned Paradise IV are keeping some of the people from VML on, I'm evidently not worth it, so I'm out on my arse. I had hoped that if I had to leave VML there might be something at the end of it, some kind of recognition for all the passion and enthusiasm I'd invested in the whole project."

Jeff Minter keeping his fans informed of his employment status on his website at www.magic.net/~yak/

"I have no idea if I am any good. I must be the only person who has never seen the video."

MP James Plaskitt, clearly with no idea of the role he is playing in *Operation Flashpoint*

"There is no date. We don't know any date. If you have a friend who claims they have 'inside info,' or there's some game news site, or some computer store at the mall who claims they know – they do not. They are making it up. There is no date. Period."

3D Realms gets defensive about the release date of *Duke Nukem Forever* on its homepage at www.planetduke.com

03 Retro Mac

UK: For Apple designers the future is past, it seems. Although no one can grumble at the impressive specs of the new iMac – and its 15-inch LCD flat screen (said to be three times as sharp as a traditional CRT display) – the design wouldn't look out of place on a set of 'Abigail's Party'. The '70s styling is certainly not as bold as Sony's GS Cube and the overgrown desk lamp look may find fewer fans than the previous multicoloured iMac iterations. Still, with an 800MHz G4 processor a SuperDrive for playing and burning custom CDs and DVDs, a 60GB harddrive and an nVidia GeForce graphics card it should keep Apple Mac users happy for the next few years. Now, if only developers would support it with a few games…

04 Online fight club

UK: Always the one getting bullied at school? *King of Fighters Online* is surely the best therapy for working through all that repressed resentment. Developed by Korea-based Unotac, the game allows players to come up against thousands of other users online. With a serviceable 3D engine and decent visuals the game is looking like an intriguing prospect. Initially you can choose one of the six main characters (Kyo, Iroi, Leona, Athena, Kula or Kim) but others can be unlocked in Team Battle mode. Of course, it doesn't actually prevent digital bullies from hunting you down, but at least you can LOL! over their bodies – with the help of a friend or two. Unotac hope to release the game in the second half of 2002.

05 Game Works

UK: From publisher ASPECT, 'Game Works Vol.1' details the development of Yu Suzuki's first five major arcade titles: *After Burner 2*, *OutRun*, *Hang-On*, *Space Harrier* and *Power Drift*. The sumptuous volume offers numerous original illustrations, including prototype designs and there is also an insight into the game designer's latest projects. As a special bonus, a GD-ROM containing the five games in their original form (although *OutRun* includes a slightly modified Ferrari as in *Shenmue II*) accompanies the publication for all Dreamcast fans to treasure. A cult book that is unlikely to spend too much time sitting around on shop shelves.

Data Stream

Amount Bill Gates gave to his charitable foundation in 2000: **$5bn**
Amount Bill Gates gave to his charitable foundation in 2001: **$2bn**
Amount Gordon Moore, chairman of emeritus Intel gave to his charitable foundation in 2000: **$5bn**
Amount Gordon Moore gave to his charitable foundation in 2001: **$300m**
Number of Game Boy Color units shipped to stores from the beginning of time to September 2001, according to Famitsu: **116m**
Number of Game Boy Advance units shipped to stores in same period according to same source: **9.6m**
Number of GameCube units shipped in same period: **510,000**
Number of PlayStation units shipped in same period: **89m**
Number of PS2 units shipped in same period: **20m**
Number of Dreamcasts shipped in same period: **10m**
Number of Wonder Swan Color units shipped in same period: **3.3m**
Number of Xbox units sold since its launch in the US, according to BBC online: **1.5m**
Price Microsoft are to sell the Xbox in Japan: **¥34,000 (£179)**


The new iMac. Edge considered making a joke about the Kubrick style, but 2001 is just *so* last year

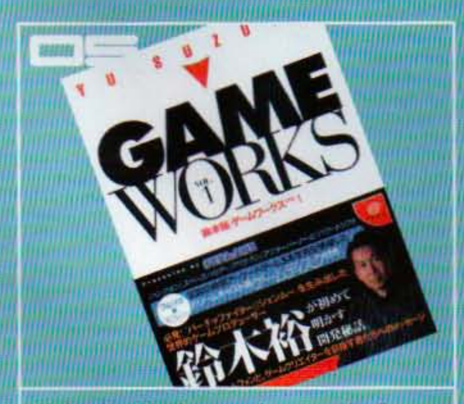









Soon SNK fans will meet online, tearfully lament the softco's passing, and then beat each other up

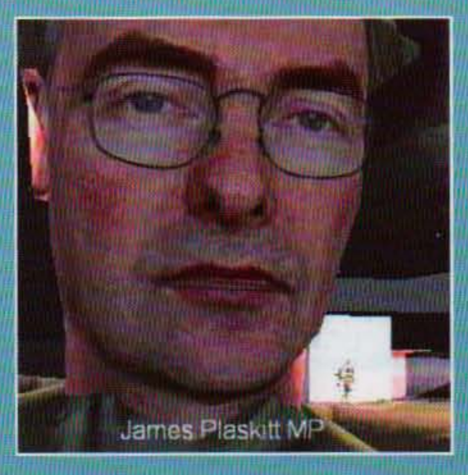


Yu Suzuki: evidently a man of many words, all unintelligible to non-Japanese speakers. Shame…

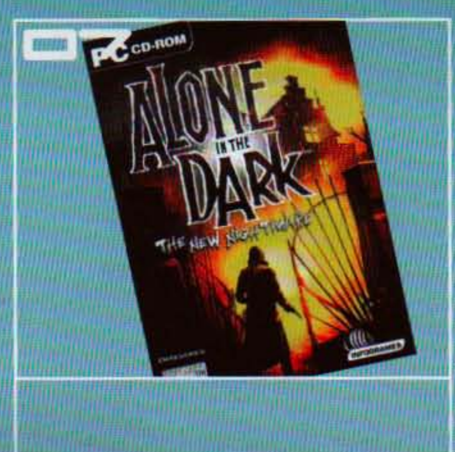

… but English gamers can always enjoy the games on the book's GD-ROM. Who needs words?

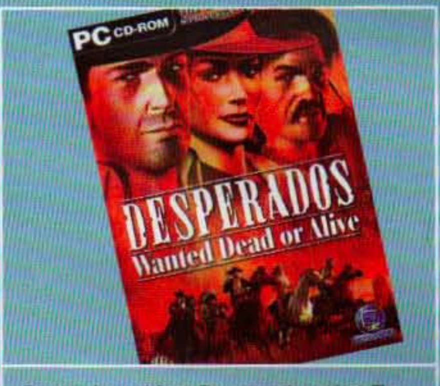


The MP's image endorses a videogame which lets evil users 'kill' the 'enemy' with 'rockets'. Evil.









Desperados and Coco Pops: together at last. The cereal wakes you up; the game sends you to sleep







Reclaim the Malvinas. Edge presumes economic resource management isn't the game's forte

06 Labour brough to Flashpoint

UK: This month it emerged that the platoon commander in Codemaster's *Operation Flashpoint* is an obscure Labour MP. James Plaskitt, the MP for Warwick & Leamington, was visiting the offices of Codemasters last year to discuss piracy when he was asked to be snapped for the game. Unknowingly he became one of the major figures in the game orchestrating troops in over 50 missions. "We were looking for a distinguished older gentleman," said Codemaster's marketing director, **David Solari**. The game is now used in the States as a military training tool, no doubt cementing further ties between the British government and US military might.

07 Infogrames' kids club

UK: Infogrames has recently launched several marketing campaigns to target younger audiences in Europe. In a major deal with Kelloggs, the French publisher is offering free demos of some of its major games on the boxes of popular cereal brands including Frosties, Coco Pops and Rice Krispies. And in a bizarre move Infogrames' *Junior Sports Football* has sponsored an under-nines football team based in Reading. The Woodley Hammers are a seven-a-side team which gets all the benefits from sponsorship, including specially designed shirts and prizes for man of the match. If only Vieira and Henry were offered such incentives, the fate of Dreamcast could have been so different.

08 Videogame argie bargie

UK: Beckham versus Simeone is nothing compared to the war which is about to break out in *Malvinas 2032*. Set on the islands which were the focal point of the Falklands war the game attempts to stir up anti-British sentiment thinly disguised in a resource management war title. "The Malvinas islands are forever Argentinean!" rants the accompanying blurb on the games Website at www.malvinas2032.com.ar/default_engl.asp. Whatever your views on the Falklands war surely no one deserves to have to play through another substandard RTS with graphics as primitive as the minds behind it.

Continue

S Club 7
Especially Hannah
GAME
For reviving the Lynx and the Jaguar
Charles Cecil
For being a charmer



The 'Lord of the Rings' movie
Surely elves are not that fey
BBC Manchester's 'The Late Debate'
Edge + Tim Vincent = panto at its best
MGS2 delay
Another depressing and cynical marketing ploy



09 Shamanspace

It's only taken four years for Steve Aylett to dominate the rusty world of UK cyberpunk. While he was initially hailed for his 'Beerlight' books, which in truth were a triumph of style over content, 'Shamanspace' sees him take the next step forward.

A mere 121 pages long, it fairly crackles with verve and ambition. Part Dadaist abstraction collided with stream of Cartesian conscienceness, it picks up the threads of reality and information flow from where William Gibson's seminal 'Neuromancer' logged off. But where that work kept one foot in the grave of the physical, Aylett's world is cut loose. It exists in another dimension entirely. He calls it etheric, although it's perhaps better understood as something closer to the spiritual.

Two factions fight an internecine war over the assassination of God. The killing is not in question, only the methods and the results: one side believing the universe can exist without the creator, the other willing to pull the plug on everything. In between this sit flashes of romance, betrayal, theological musing, even an action chase through Paris. Plot and characters are strong too but matter little in the overall scheme. For instead of writing a book, Aylett's success is writing the reverse. Slipsliding between the word disassociation and a poetic rhythm of prose, which some may find disconcerting, 'Shamanspace' is a conventional story revealed in a completely unconventional manner. Rivals will read it and weep. Everyone else will be transfixed.

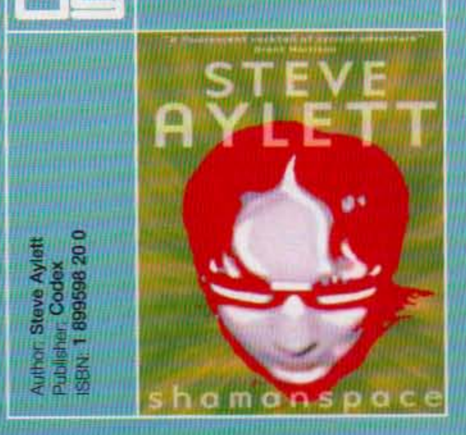
10 Schild's Ladder

In the balance between the components that make up science fiction, the modern successors to Wells and Asimov seem far more interested in the sci than the fi. It's certainly the case with Greg Egan, the prolific author of numerous books of science futurist bent.

His latest, 'Schild's Ladder', opens with a favourite of the genre: the introduction of a new branch of physics, the illusive missing link between Relativity and Newtonianism. Presumably this is highly stimulating for quantum physics grads, but as the first chapter of a book it creates something of an obstacle for mere mortals. This isn't too say that there's nothing for the uninformed however. Once the clever stuff is out the way, there's a half-decent story to be uncovered.

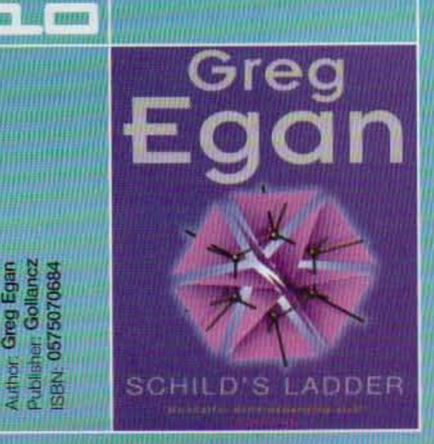
After an experiment with this new physics (which Egan names the Sarumpaet Rules), goes wrong, the universe is threatened by the creation of novo-vacuum which destroys all matter with which it comes into contact. With the inhabitants of whole planets fleeing its path, two rival groups of scientists attempt to either destroy or stabilise the novo-vacuum. All have stupid names, usually involving Tchs or Zys. More interesting, is the concept of a universe were people have been reduced to data and thus have gained a measure of immortality. The death of a character is merely limited to the local loss of data since they last backed up their brain. Still, even committed readers will find 'Schild's Ladder' hard going in places.

09



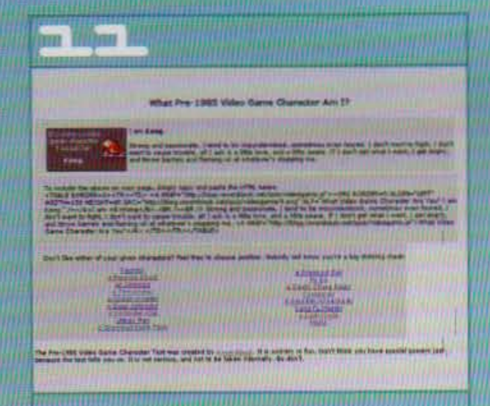
Author: Steve Aylett
Publisher: Codex
ISBN: 1 899598 20 0

10



Author: Greg Egan
Publisher: Gollancz
ISBN: 0575070684

11



Site: **What Pre-1985 Video Game Character Am I?**
URL: **blog.ravenblack.net/quiz/videogame.pl**

11 Website of the month

While personalities across the team range from Space Invader to Asteroid, **Edge** is Kong. Strong and passionate, **Edge** tends to be misunderstood, sometimes even feared. **Edge** doesn't want to fight, **Edge** doesn't want to cause trouble, and all **Edge** asks for is a little love and a little peace. If **Edge** doesn't get what it wants, **Edge** gets angry, and throws barrels and flaming oil at whatever's stopping it.

Edge recommends you go to the site, answer ten quick multiple choice questions, and find out what pre-1985 videogame character you are.



12 Advertainment

Japan: The realisation is likely to prove a digestion-arresting shock for PAL N64 owners but, in Japan, Nintendo can actually be bothered to market its games properly. Here, then, is another cute GC TV advert...



Female voice: "I've finally started living on my own."



"I have a house now – it is small, but it is my own."



"I've already managed to get some chairs – and a table, too. Every day brings new exciting surprises!"



"And I've also managed to make many friends."



Voiceover: "Another world – right beside you. The amazing animal forest is waiting for you."



Female voice: "Why don't you come and live here, too?"





Voiceover: "*Animal Forest Plus*. GameCube."



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Freedom: making developers sloppy?

We are sloppy.
Ryu's PAL conversion:
Dragon punch made in summer
Misses in autumn

We are sloppy, but we will educate. RedEye has a new hobby.

Birds wake outside, sing
Tired skin lit by VDU
Continue Yes/No

This extended period of convalescence, the reasons for which were detailed in **E**106, gives RedEye a chance to step back, a chance to get away. Oh!

The Getaway slips
Flowers bud. Sony's thieves' stall.
Then Hell freezes over

A haiku is, at least according to its English dictionary definition, structured as a verse with three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables, traditionally invoking an aspect of nature or the seasons. That's the surface, which is somewhat like describing a videogame as a continuous stream of alphanumeric noise, traditionally invoking spaceships and gunfire – it's factually correct, but essentially missing the point.

Which, in this case, is purity of vision: a haiku's a moment, a fraction's aesthetics captured in a written single breath. The form is strict, unyielding, but as critical to the sentiment as the words contained within it. Writing haiku takes years of practice, refinement, education and re-education. Writing acceptable haiku takes longer, and while it's perfectly possible to quickly throw together something in a 5-7-5 dynamic, you probably really shouldn't. Unless you're sick and broken, of course, because then you can do anything you want in the name of self-indulgence.

Press-release frenzy
"Summer mission-pack mayhem!"
Reprint, journo scum

Wasted words are lazy, bloated, ugly. We learn this every month from the space-fillers we read in magazines: 20 sexiest videogame characters, 50 foods which would make great videogames, 200 articles we were sure you lot wouldn't let us get away with. And within those articles, words that kill the word count, journalists writing to a number. Reviews that spend 500 words taking you through the game's plot and another 500 listing the weapons, or previews based on a glance at screenshots, or nonsensical hyperbolic exclusives. And blah, blah, blah; the point is that the constraints of the haiku make it the exact opposite; there isn't a syllable wasted. Everything is targeted. It makes you work.

Forty-hour rescue:
Rayguns and time, seasons of
Mediocrity

We are sloppy, and getting sloppier. The capacity for data storage within the videogame industry has increased exponentially, and, seemingly, at a much greater rate than the industry's creativity. All four next-gen formats – Xbox, GameCube, PS2 and PC – work using some kind of DVD format, a recording system which offers the potential for hours of budget-sapping video and thousands of megabytes of badly produced streaming audio and a hundred other things that shouldn't have anything to do with videogames. There's no evidence that this is going to make games any better: perhaps the opposite. Frightening thought. We need gaming haikus.

For a while we almost had them. Loading times and the limits on cart size meant space was a consideration; if you only had room to load/code one idea, you made sure it was a good one. The N64 saw the peak – the last age when developers couldn't just spew what they wanted onto a silver disc, when they had to make difficult decisions about content, had to choose excellence over the average. *Mario 64*, *GoldenEye*, and *Zelda 64*, three of the best games in recent memory, were all coded to fit inside strict, punishing limits. They were compact genius. And then Nintendo dropped the format, and RedEye started to worry, because when the borders are taken away, it takes discipline to keep colouring within the lines. Or to put it another way...

Mario Sunshine
Now with loads of FMV
And shit, shit, shit, shit.

That's the worry.

In RedEye's nightmares he's approached by a Shigeru Miyamoto on the come-down from SGI crack. "Look," he pauses, and starts to shake. "This is what we thought you wanted! We've filled every byte of this DVD with glorious sweat-shop visuals. We paid tiny school-leavers to render futuristic cities, to render them as wide and tall as your eyes can take. They're huge!" Tears well up in his eyes. "You couldn't cram any more data on the disk! Not an empty sector! Nothing wasted!" But he knows that using the space isn't the point; it's about using it well. Hey, what would be the use in RedEye filling up this page with meaningless crap every month?

So we are sloppy, but we will educate. We need to remember haikus; we need to stop writing for the sake of writing and filling space because it's there. We need to set ourselves limits inside which every byte must count. RedEye wants a future where bedroom code-kidz hone silver-sleek code to fit inside tiny compilers. RedEye wants *Tetris* inside the purest line, a firstperson shooter in a hit-filled paragraph, the whole universe inside the most perfect mind-expanding chapter. Think of pure aesthetic moments; think combinations of tightly wound code and pixel perfect balancing; think time invested in care, not in expanse. The philosophy is tiny, compact, but it's a maxim that could leads to bigger things, divert developers away from financially sapping irrelevance. Small is beautiful.

We need to remember haikus; we need to stop writing for the sake of writing and filling space because it's there

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge's***

Recently a PR executive involved in the games industry spoke out against what he perceived as an unhelpful tradition in videogame reviewing. Why, he asked, did reviewers insist on talking about the technology in games? After all, film reviewers don't harp on about technology. If we want to give games the attention they deserve, he argued, we should be judging them on the story, and the experience they provide.

Well, perhaps he is half right. When attempting to evoke the splendours of *Devil May Cry*'s gothic architecture, or the delicious fear induced by *Half-Life*, it's not particularly helpful to describe the polygon engine. We need a higher-level aesthetic vocabulary that might borrow from the fields of art criticism, psychology or graphic novels. And any discussion of *Metal Gear Solid 2* among the cognoscenti is probably going to be centred on the content of the story and the game's handling of its



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Technology: an essential topic for any videogame review?

story elements. Again, there is no need to speak in very technical terms.

But in a sense, these games are the exception. We don't need to discuss them in technical terms because, at base, the technology works (unless you are unfortunate enough to be playing the nasty PAL version of *DMC*). Book reviewers don't need to mention that a book's pages are of a certain size, printed on both sides and bound together at the spine, because the technology of the codex is mature and standardised. And the cinematic technologies of camera and projection have also been standardised for decades. There is no appreciable difference for an audience even when a film is entirely shot, edited and projected in the digital realm. And so, in these cases, there is no reason to talk about the medium's technological aspects: we are freed for higher-level aesthetic discussion.

However, videogames are not as mature a form as books or films. And so it is often necessary to talk about the technology in a game, precisely because that technology is broken. Take, for example, framerate, that eternal bugbear of over-ambitious developers. The importance of a smooth and consistent framerate – a high temporal resolution – can hardly be overemphasised. Inadequate temporal resolution limits the flow of information available to the player, and thus limits the speed and fluency of his or her conversation with the game system – which is one definition of what 'immersiveness' might imply. When I'm playing a busy level of *Perfect Dark* in Perfect Agent mode, and I find that the horizontal swing of my weapon has been quantised into absurdly large arcs by the low temporal resolution, I find that the outcome depends more on luck, or grim determination, than the exercise of subtle motor skills. As one of the Free Radical team said recently, framerate directly affects the quality of the experience in this style of game. This is true of racing games as well, where in some poorly programmed cases the player must negotiate snapshots of a road that occur 20 metres apart, rather than smoothly racing through coherent space.

The temporal resolution of film has been standardised at 24 frames per second. Not much room for discussion there. But there would be if we were constantly subjected to movies in which the projection rate fluctuated wildly. We'd complain about a film that dropped to ten frames per second every now and again. And films must still occasionally be discussed from a technological point of view. When I reviewed the 'Tomb Raider' film, for example, it struck me that the CGI was unusually poor. The digitally animated rock monkeys seemed far less convincing than the painstakingly realised stop-frame monsters of Ray Harryhausen 35 years ago, and the visual disjunction between the (literally) incredible enemies and the naturalistic live action rendered the monsters less convincing, in context, than they were in any of the *Tomb Raider* games, where Lara, her environment and her enemies are all rendered at the same level of visual complexity.

A videogame is built on a foundation of technology. If the foundation is shaky, the building is going to wobble

A videogame, like a film, is an aesthetic monument built on a foundation of technology. If the foundation is shaky, the building is going to wobble. And so far the foundations are shaky more often in games than they are in films.

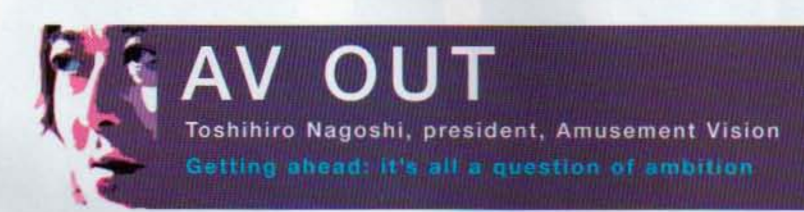
Take *Grand Theft Auto III*. To say that this is an excellent game which could have been improved with higher temporal resolution does not seem to be an unfair comment. In fact the real technological flaw in its system is the targeting of non-scoped weapons in the thirdperson view. There has been no excuse for such amazingly poor implementation of targeting since at least the innovation of the Z-lock in *Ocarina of Time*. As a game critic, I could spend my whole time waxing lyrical about the city's atmosphere, the stunt jumps and the amusing 'Sopranos'-esque storyline, but I'd be remiss not to point out that the targeting system makes it harder than it should be to enjoy those rarefied qualities. Technology is not just one aspect of a game that can be happily divorced from the others; everything else depends upon it.

I have a dream. One day, all videogames will be like *Jak and Daxter*. Before you prepare to burn this magazine in disgust, let me explain. There can hardly be any argument that *Jak and Daxter* is technologically superb. So the PS2 is condemned to jaggies and low-resolution textures, is it? Uh, no. The temporal resolution is mostly very solid; there is a 60Hz mode; there are no loading times and the camera behaves itself. Faced with a game of such outstanding artisanship, we can immediately move to higher-level discussions of the environmental design, the range of interesting actions available, and other considerations of aesthetics and gameplay. We are freed to decide whether we like the game or not for its own sake.

When technology works, it becomes invisible. At high levels, it becomes indistinguishable from magic. But there's no short cut to such immersive sorcery. The technology has to function first, and if it doesn't, we have to stand up and say so.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com





Here is the New Year! How was the industry at the end of last year and at the beginning of this one? Well it looks good to me. Hit titles (*Smash Brothers*, *Pikmin* or *Animal Forest Plus*) arrived on GC while the PS2 price dropped. Both consoles benefited from great sales and they are both well on the way. Regarding PS2, what has been so great? *GT3 Concept*, *MGS2*... Or maybe *VF4*, coming on January 31? I think this title has at this moment quite an impact. Mmm... I think all went as expected, no? It gives me the impression no breakthrough really happened during that period. But, everything is cool. Now, Xbox is not yet launched in Japan.

While I'm writing this, Xbox was presented at CES (Consumer Electronic Show) in Las Vegas. The console made a great start in the US, no, a historical launch according to figures, with 1.5 million units on the market during the holiday season. Plus, by the end of 2002, it appears as though Xbox could reach six million units. Well, releasing 1.5 million units is one thing and having a significant impact on the market is another. However, if the company succeeds in releasing six million consoles by the end of this year, it should have an impact.

However, we can raise a few questions still not answered. For example, how Microsoft intends to work in the videogame market. Also, will Microsoft succeed in delivering successful network content for its console? In another way, will the online services have enough depth? Questions remain numerous. But it is obvious that we would not be able to evaluate the network side of the console until it is operational. I mean this is one of the foundations of this console. I'm quite excited to see that in action.

But above all, the launch line-up is especially intriguing, starting with the number of games available. I mean it is certainly the first time a console had so many titles available for a launch. What would be the impact? Plus, would be this impact different according to each market? This is something I can't wait to see and February 22 looks like being a very interesting day to me.

Well that's it for hardware, now I would like to speak about something totally different. Days ago, I was asked by someone from another company, "Did you join Sega as a game planner?" I answered, "No, I joined as a designer." The man looked troubled, so I asked him, "Why do you look so troubled?" He said, "Well, most of the producers and directors were planners so I thought you would have been, too." Well, this time I was the one looking troubled. I mean what does it matter what you have done before in order to become a director or producer?

So I would like to tell you what I did to get to my situation now — my profile in a way. Actually, I'm a man of many talents: producer, director, planner and... yes CEO. But, as I said before, I started as a designer. Yes, that means I made illustrations; characters in games, backgrounds, effects, etc. I was working looking at models or thinking by myself. Once, I took part, for the first time, in a meeting about advertisement (the element you display on screen when the game is running itself without anyone playing: screens, ranking, controls explanation, etc). We had to decide what to use. Then I had few ideas and they were adopted. As I can remember them, it was the way the game title appeared and the simple way the game controls were displayed. It was very easy to understand.

At the end of the meeting, a person asked me "How did you find such ideas?" I still remember me answering like this, "Mr A's idea was very cool but it uses a long time. As you are not playing, looking at the animation you are already fed up. Mr B's idea offers great visuals and good timing but in no way does it explain the greatness of the title. It has not sufficient impact. So you are still wondering what kind of game it is. I had the feeling that players had to understand in a single moment the spirit of the game. Both ideas looked as they were unable to increase income so it was not good anyway." Well, I know I surely looked pretentious, and I have to admit that writing these lines makes me embarrassed.

Anyway, let's go back to the story. So the person who asked me the question went to his superior and told him what I had said. Then the big boss called me. He said, "You are quite a guy. You are new in the company but you have already learned about marketing?" I had this answer, "I have no idea about marketing issues but I used to study cinema and it appeared what we were talking about was quite similar to what I studied so I decided to use my knowledge. Well, it appeared to have an impact on the marketing side..." I think it was my very first step.

Then I was given the chance to go from static illustration to movie, animated sequences, in order to determine the best impact on the game. At that time I feel, it was a chance for me to use this knowledge from my study of cinema. Then my career took off from designer to main designer. Moreover, it was just the time when the technology evolved from 2D to 3D and camerawork became one of the most important points of the game. So my position became more important. It was also a period of great stress. Why's that? Working on animating sequences was very interesting but it was the time I started to want to design the animation myself. In simpler words, I wanted to define the entire sequence myself, not just working on someone else's. Then I realized there was only one way, to design a game.

Working on animating sequences was very interesting but it was the time I started to want to design the animation myself

To do so, I had to become a planner. One day, I make the request to my superiors: I wanted to make a game myself. So I went to the planner, director and main designer. That resulted in my first title, *Daytona USA*. What do you think about my journey?

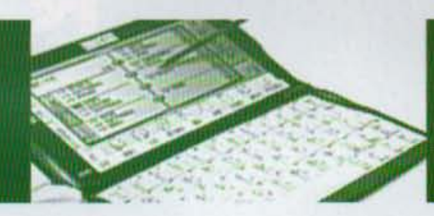
There's always a chance, even a small one, to get an opportunity. I'm sure in this industry there are so many people going from one task to another but what you do does not necessarily make you deliver all your skills. There is one objective you can set for this year, "I'm going to be a director!" What do you think? I believe that from these people will come the ones who are going to change the industry. See you!

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4



So this is it. As the dark abyss of final crunch period hell stares us full in the face the time has come to bring our 'Diary of a Startup' to a close. As I look back on the three long years of Elixir, an eternity seems to have elapsed and yet also paradoxically day-to-day I never seem to have the time to even catch my breath.

It seems appropriate to end the diary now, as we are no longer really a startup. True, we've released nothing as yet (as a multitude of people never tire of constantly reminding me) but we are on the final straight of completing our first (and what we believe to be truly ground-breaking) game, *Republic: The Revolution*. We've also built a strong company of over 60 talented developers which has had to be put together painstakingly and encouraged to explore their limits on ambitious and original projects and technologies. Only a couple of people have ever left Elixir, which is testimony to the fact that the



VIDEOGAME DIARY

Demis Hassabis, CEO, Elixir Studios

Crunch time: Elixir is close to releasing its first game

environment we've built here is a happy one where creativity and responsibility thrive. That we've recently been joined by Jamie Doornbos, the lead simulation engineer on *The Sims*, to work on *Republic* after having seen it and being excited by its potential leads me to think that we must be doing something right.

Major challenges have confronted us at almost every turn. Financially, it has taken a great deal of willpower and effort to get the money together to be able to complete a game the size of *Republic* (a great deal of which has come from our own pocket). Technically, the challenges have been enormous with the building of both the Totality graphics engine and the LoD AI architecture from scratch. Creatively, the challenge has been to keep true to the original, ridiculously ambitious vision while trying to work around tough practical constraints. We've also had to make a game about a complex subject into something fun and accessible.

We're proud of the fact that we've overcome so many of these major obstacles to even get as far as we have when so many others would have fallen by the wayside long ago. And for that I'd like to thank the key members of the team that have been here from the beginning with me through all the highs and the lows: Dave Silver, Tim Clarke, Richard Powell, Wayne Kresil and Joe McDonagh. As to whether it all comes together to create a sum greater than its parts I'll leave that for you to decide when you see the completed game.

So why kick off a new company with a project as massive as *Republic*? Why stick my neck out so far and take such a risk when I could have done something a lot safer? Why didn't I just do *Theme Park Plus* as my first game with Elixir and then graduate to the earth-shattering *Theme Park Plus Plus* as the follow-up game? We could have probably comfortably finished two standard sim games by now and they would have probably been reasonably successful. I often get asked the sorts of questions posed above and indeed during some of the darkest moments I have wondered myself.

But then when something cool happens, like a new piece of cutting edge technology comes together for the first time or a tough design problem is elegantly solved or a piece of what was previously just an outrageous dream starts to materialise, I'm suddenly reminded of the reasons for doing this. There is nothing like the buzz of working in virgin territory, exploring paths that no one else has trodden before and then seeing an outsider's eyes light up when for the first time they see what was previously thought of as unachievable. Anyone creative, technically or otherwise, who has worked on an original game will tell you that. Pushing yourself in new directions to see just what can be achieved if you really give it your all is an incredibly addictive drug – you know it's bad for your health and sanity but you always come back for more.

That special team camaraderie you only get during intense crunch periods is something that everyone seems to remember fondly

Life is short (as I said way back in one of the first diaries) and getting shorter by the day. How many opportunities do you get to really make a difference, to make a game that has the potential to be remembered and maybe recognised as an important step forward? I believe you make a choice early on in your career: either you will one day attempt to do something like that and work your whole life towards ekeing out an opportunity or you decide to opt out and take the safer route. Sure it's risky and sometimes gruelling to try to attempt to make possible, something that was previously thought impossible but then, when has anything new and worthy really been achieved without risks being taken and sacrifices made? And what's more, I don't believe that there is ever a safe time to make that leap whenever one decides to do it. Doing something new is inherently going to carry risks.

Any project like that is also going to take time you only have to look at any of the recently successful games that have pushed boundaries in one way or another to see that: *The Sims*, *Black & White*, *Max Payne* have all taken more than four years and in some cases a lot more. In fact if you could see all the hurdles that you have to overcome at the start of an ambitious project then no one would probably ever have the heart to even begin.

At the moment I'm in that development limbo that some of you will be familiar with where nothing else seems important enough to do until the game is finished. Slowly more and more parts of your life are placed on the bonfire of extended development crunch. First weekday evenings disappear, then weekends, then sleep, then any extraneous non-directly life supporting activity. It's pretty easy to experience burnout under those sorts of pressures as the only way to finish the game quicker is to work harder and harder for longer and longer hours. And yet for those small moments of achievement it is all worth it and that special team camaraderie you only get during intense crunch periods is something that everyone seems to look back on and remember fondly. Then finally there is the ultimate kick of seeing someone else take a game you've helped create, play it and tell you that it's cool – there are not many feelings in life that can compare to that.

Thanks for listening and I hope we provided you some interesting insights into the growing pains of a development studio. Trying to make a game as ambitious as *Republic* while building a company from scratch has nearly killed me, but then I wouldn't have chosen any other way. And hopefully when *Republic* does come out people will agree that all the effort has been worth it and the time well spent. I'm confident that they will.

Demis Hassabis is the CEO at Elixir Studios

Edge's most wanted

Auto Modellista

Motorised cel-shaded beauty as Capcom hopes to do to the racing genre what it has done with the 2D beat 'em up. But hopefully with fewer sequels this time.



(PS2, GC, Xbox) Capcom

Project Ego

Given Peter Molyneux's involvement, it's unlikely that this will be available anytime soon, but it fleshes out Microsoft's release schedule with a likely AAA title.



(Xbox) Microsoft

Jedi Knight II

With *Obi Wan* currently looking like it could be a bit of a disappointment, it's down to Kyle Katarn to Force Jump his way into next-gen gaming territory.



(PC) LucasArts

Biohazard

Edge can't wait to relive zombie-bashing memories against a detailed baroque interior backdrop of which Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen would no doubt approve.



(GameCube) Capcom

Going Shopping

Edge takes a look through the retail window

Shenmue II, *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, *Final Fantasy X*, *Agent Under Fire*, *Civilization III*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*, *Jak and Daxter*, *SSX Tricky*, *Smash Brothers DX*, *Pro Evolution Soccer*, *Devil May Cry*, *Rogue Leader*, *World Rally Championship*, *Aliens Versus Predator 2*, *Maximo*, *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Dead or Alive 3*, and *Pikmin*. If money were no object, and assuming that you were willing to import games from Japan and the US, it would have been possible to get hold of all of the above over Christmas.

But supposing you did get hold of all of these titles; what would you do to get your videogaming kicks during the rest of the year? Of course consumers are more willing to part with their cash at Christmas and Easter. But the exaggerated obsession with two slender retail windows isn't good for gamers. It's become a self-fulfilling prophecy: fewer games are purchased outside these two periods because fewer new games are available. Sure, the games released at Christmas will still be available during the following months, sometimes at discount prices, but with retailers and publishers seemingly now fixated with instant sales, the chances are that they'll be relocated to more obscure corners of the shop, and not always in plentiful numbers.

It's not just the paucity of new releases that's the problem though. Titles with slightly quirky subject matter that might otherwise take several months to sell simply aren't given the chance; instead they're prematurely stripped from the shelves. Publishers also lose out, as their latest opus falls in the face of an unnaturally high level of competition. Most importantly though, **Edge**'s job becomes harder. With fewer new titles appearing outside Christmas and Easter, it becomes more difficult to bring you a varied prescreen section – though this month it ranges from *Battle Hoshin* to *V-Rally 3*.

But the fact is that sometimes punters defy even the predictions of the sharpest marketing department. Contrary to expectations, *David Beckham Soccer* didn't take the charts by storm. And despite *Harry Potter*'s commercial dominance over Christmas, the lucrative-licence-less *GTA III* has rightfully returned to the top of the charts and continues to sell well. Each month **Edge** strives to bring you a comprehensive analysis of the most important games in development. But it would make our job easier if publishers and retailers stopped underestimating the game-buying public and started releasing games all year round.











Final Fantasy XI

Mixed reviews from beta testers have cast a shadow over Square's great online experiment. Can the RPG legend deliver?



This pointy-eared little fellow is a Tarutaru – a rather harmless looking creature whose race is renowned for its magical capability. They can usually be found roaming around the Federation of Windurst

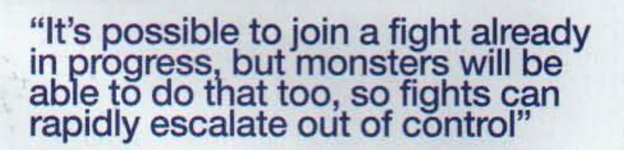






The name of the player is displayed above their character's head, and this being a massively multiplaye title, the screen can get crowded with competing monickers. Eeking out a conversation may get tough

You'd think after the nightmarish failure of 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within', that Square would want to play it safe for a few years, but no. Brushing aside the warm welcome given to its latest traditional *Final Fantasy* venture (*FFX* – 2.3 million units sold so far in Japan), the company recently held a private show in Tokyo to further explain its vision for the much more controversial *Final Fantasy XI*: the



"It's possible to join a fight already in progress, but monsters will be able to do that too, so fights can rapidly escalate out of control"

world's first massively multiplayer online console game. Fans are unsure about this new direction and their concerns have been stoked by some negativity from beta testers.

Set in the environmentally luscious land of Vana'Diel, which is unfortunately being attacked by a strange race of monsters, *FFXI* offers the online gamer a totally definable experience. The first task is to create a new character, choosing its race from five basic types (one very human, the others variations on the classic elf), and its job from six options — fighter, priest, sorcerer (red, black or white) and thief. You can also choose the character's home country from three generally peaceful rivals, each boasting different degrees of technological advance. There is some competition between countries though – apparently the more monsters you kill, the more points you earn for your nation. Once a week, the points are totted up and the state with the most has its borders expanded. On a personal level, high scorers get bonus cash and discounts on certain items in the shops.

Communication, as with *PSO*, comes via a modified Logitec keyboard and is a vital element of the action. Through talking to other players you can set up guilds of up to six members, and it's also possible to create alliances with two other guilds when a particularly large monster needs dealing with. The combat system is typical *FF* fare – it's driven by scrolling menus, a lock-on function allows you to target the enemy and you can't leave the fight until someone is dead.

However, you can talk to your fellow guild members during the fight, which is particular useful if you need someone else to dive in while you withdraw and heal. Early reports suggest that it's also possible to join a fight already in progress, but monsters will be abl to do that too, which means fights can rapid escalate out of control. Losing means having your stats put back to zero.

As for those beta tests, the worry is, tha by ambitiously aiming to provide a massively multiplayer persistent world, Square has ove stretched itself. *PSO* only allows four players in a world at once, and provides a limited game environment. Through this more restrictive design, Sonic Team has been able to shape and direct the experience, focusing on action and building a rich and colourful landscape. There have been mumbles that the world of *FFXI* looks washed out and grey in comparison. Some testers have also beer



Some beta testers have criticised the distinct lack of colour in *Final Fantasy XI*'s environments




Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Square**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **April (Japan), TBC (UK)**









The invading monsters come in various forms. This many-eyed squid being a more ridiculous example

disappointed by the paucity of personalisation options. *FFXI* offers three body types and two haircuts – a tiny selection compared to *PSO*.

Although the huge success of *FFX* has taken some of the pressure off Square, *FFXI* remains an incredibly risky endeavour – especially with the company expected to post losses for 2002. Investors will be looking for sure fire hits, rather than extravagant online experiments. Even if the beta testers had been full of praise for the project, there are other concerns. Prospective players will need a PS2, hard disc, modem, keyboard, subscription to PlayOnline and a copy of the game – traditionally, console owners have been loathe to fork out just for an extra joypad.

And of course, there's also Enix lurking in the wings with its delayed *Dragon Quest VIII*, just waiting for Square to slip up. The pressure is on. Whatever happens, though, expect revolution.





Conversation comes via a keyboard and an intuitive menu-driven system. Mastering this is vital to forming guilds and managing combat

The Y-Project

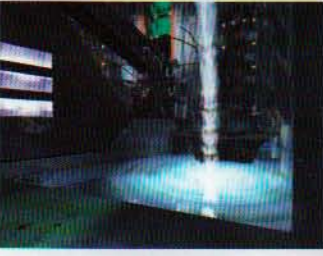
Caricatured super-futurism, crazy weapons that turn enemies to stone, and sci-fi lunacy envisioning a GM nightmare. Y? Why not?



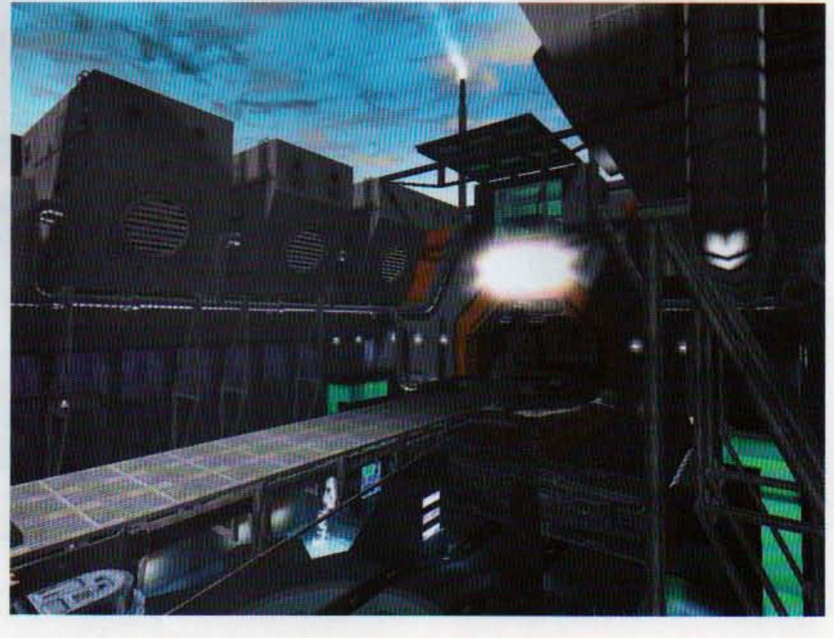
If only we could read *The Y-Project's* warning letter to the past. "Dear Humanity," it would say. "If you must seek to colonise other worlds, do be careful when it comes to unleashing genetically modified insects on virgin planets. It could be that they're much better at colonising than you are." A new paragraph: "And," the letter would continue, "when it comes to protecting your single city from the circling mutant insects, might I suggest that using a big glass dome is, perhaps, asking for trouble?"

Westka Interactive's vision of a peaceful world destroyed by man-made beasties might be carved in disaster B-movie heaven, but the game looks to offer a little more than just gaming cliché. Nominally a firstperson shooter taking place inside the swarmed, ruined, city, *The Y-Project*'s objective is to rescue survivors and find out what went wrong. But you're not alone – two surviving factions compete for your attentions, and while both have the same goal, the Science section believe that the best way of destroying the insects is by using humanity's superior intelligence, while, predictably, the Military section just wants to shoot everything.

So, before each of the game's five sections, each side offers a number of items, weapons, and upgrades to the player as an incentive to join their fighting force. It becomes a straight choice between brains and brute force, and while you'll have to make the same decision again in a level's time, the things on offer will be different. Turn something down once and you won't get offered it again – the only way to see the stuff you've missed will be to replay the game, but then that's the point. Different routes make themselves available through each level depending on the items in the player's inventory, and several different solutions to each of the puzzle subquests exist, too.

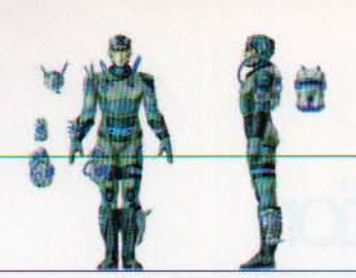


While the water isn't quite up to *Baldur's Gate* level, the particle effects prove pleasing





Westka promises its outside locations will be huge, and that winged enemies will have full 3D AI – they'll be able to go over objects as well as just around



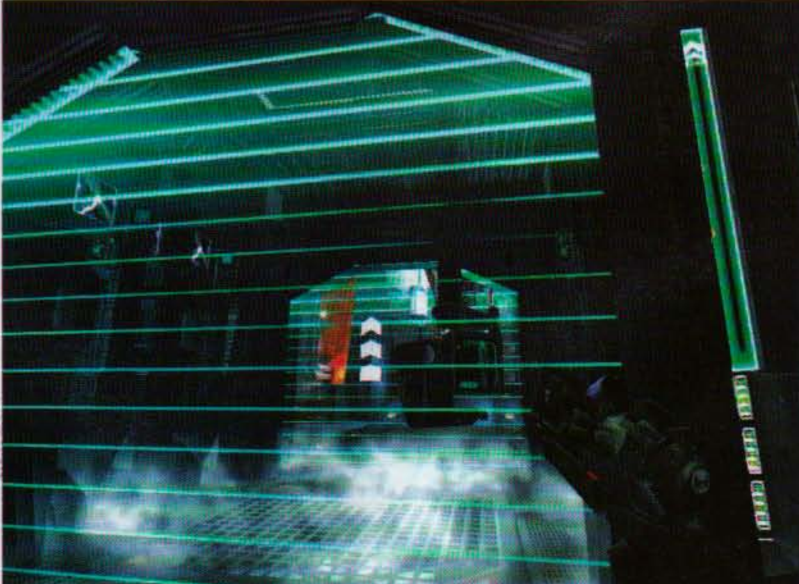
Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Westka Interactive**
Origin: **Germany**
Release: **2003**

While scenery is dynamic, and machinery can transport players, jumping puzzles will be avoided

For example, during one mission the player might pass a bank of monitors and catch sight of a woman trapped on top of a statue by a group of insects. Those choosing the military path might simply storm into the room, gun down the prowling insects and rescue the girl. Other, less cavalier players, might make their way through an air vent, aided by a fire extinguisher provided by the Science group, and find themselves in a position of safety from where elimination of the enemy is nothing more than a formality, even with weaker weaponry. Or players might choose the third way: inserting a coin into a nearby jukebox and using terrible 20th century music to drive off the foe.

"Westka Interactive's vision might be carved in B-movie heaven, but the game looks to offer a little more than just gaming cliché"

There's also a perceptible non-linearity within each section, too, with more of a coherent area-based feel rather than a succession of sequential levels, and each location requiring a number of visits to see all the game has to offer. The real-world feel should be compounded by the developer's decision to hire a trained architect to give the locations the game the same solidity and spacial grandeur that marked Bungie's *Oni*. That's consistent with a wider policy of Westka, to hire specialists from outside the industry wherever it's useful to do so, a considered move from a company who seems determined to evolve the FPS.

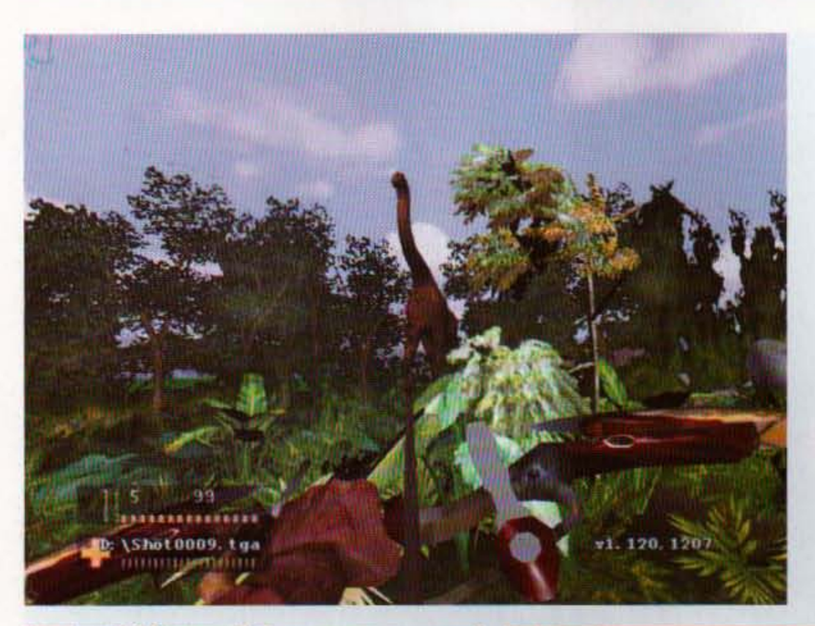


The lighting in *The Y-Project* truly impresses, taking full advantage of GeForce 3 technology. The steam on the floor is particle based, demonstrated to Edge in wireframe, and dissipates as the player walks through it

Turok: Evolution

Format: PS2, Xbox,
Publisher: Accla
Developer: Iguana Entertainm
Origin:
Release: Winter 20

The Turok series has lost some of its lustre in recent years, but Iguana looks to be on top form with the next instalment which includes flying roughback on soaring dinosaurs



The title says everything. The original *Turok* stunned N64 owners when it was first released back in 1997, but the sequel, although playing well for the majority of the game, suffered from some lamentable design flaws. And the less said about *Turok 3* the better. It's been more of a degeneration than an evolution. But Texas-based developer Iguana Entertainment is keen to win new fans, taking the hero back in time, and in turn, taking the game's design back to winning principles.

In a brave move David Dienstbier, the game's creative director, unveiled an early build of the game to **Edge**. The code isn't optimised, the lighting isn't in and there's no bump or specular mapping to speak of, but with at least seven months work to go the game is exhibiting some fine qualities. It's certainly encouraging to find a development studio (and its publisher, Acclaim) willing to showcase a game which has an impressive physique but, at present, little graphical finer



Though some detail and texture is absent at the moment the manner in which the jungle foliage reacts to your movements is particularly striking

First impressions certainly hint at an amazing sense of scale. The jungle environments have been built to communicate a sense of claustrophobia, wi densely packed flora moving to the movements of both the hero and enemies. Individual branches twitch and sway to alert you to wildlife – whether they be friend or fo Creatures currently populating the *Turok* world include velociraptors and brachiosaur The latter, in particular, are huge in scope, and can even be felled by a rocket launcher to fall onto oncoming assailants.

However, most modern FPS games car only be separated by one crucial element: th quality of the AI. Enemy group dynamics are promised with behaviour based on the alph male leaders influencing events. Take down the most powerful opponent and the others will react depending on their chances of survival. A slew of gadgets will also make it the final cut including remote devices and poison darts.

There will also be urban settings to punctuate the jungle tension and the heady mixture of technology and primitive weapon will return. The most impressive addition to the prequel, however, is a flying component which sees the player taking to the skies or the back of a winged dinosaur. Both air-to-ground and air-to-air targets can be attacke with a variety of weapons and the game engine handles the change from firstperson perspective to flight with ease. Although these four flying segments are triggered at key points, the freedom to roam the environments extends to discovering alternate routes and hidden secrets. While *Turok: Evolution* is not likely to revolutionise the FPS, it is certainly showing a return to form for Iguana.







Weapons include both primitive and futuristic elements. It's also possible to 'build' certain items as you go through the story. A simple handgun, for instance, can be upgraded to incorporate a sniper scope. Fans of the series will be pleased to hear that there are many gizmos and gadgets to rival the cerebral bore of the second title

Speedball Arena

Format: **PC, Xbox, PS2, GC (TBC)**
Publisher: **TBA**
Developer: **The Bitmap Brothers**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **December (PC)**

A retrogaming favourite, and a true classic of the Amiga's glory years, Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe remains the ultimate future sports sim. Can Arena supersede its lauded peer?

More an exercise in reaffirming IP than a true sequel *per se*, and produced on a limited budget, *Speedball 2100* (**E**90, 4/10) was a disappointment. While reportedly well-received by PlayStation owners with no prior knowledge of the franchise, it was invariably eschewed or condemned by fans of its classic Amiga-based predecessor – **Edge**, piqued by a pang of nostalgia, included. It's heartening, then, that veteran codeshop The Bitmap Brothers is attempting to redress the balance with *Speedball Arena*, a comprehensive update and overhaul of *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe*, its most celebrated work to date.

Provisionally pencilled in for a December release on PC, with console conversions to follow, *Speedball Arena* already exists in a playable state. "We had a TV crew in for a 'first look' recently and they were shocked at exactly how much we had running," reveals lead designer, **Ed Bartlett**. "The screenshots are not mock-ups, and I can also assure you that they are very early test graphics, so you can still expect a massive leap in quality from what you are seeing now. The network code has not really been touched yet, but you can play with two humans on a single machine using the traditional top-down view, and already it has moments of brilliance."

Bartlett promises a vastly improved 'career' mode for singleplayer games, a new class system to reinforce the roles of players plus specific abilities for each, and the introduction of the increasingly ubiquitous Z-lock targeting system. Additionally, its control system will allow for a variety of context-sensitive moves, and will be tailored for each format – playing on a PC with keyboard and mouse is, apparently, a revelation. Principally, though, gamers will find *Arena*'s multiplayer aspect of greatest interest, and specifically its online matches where each team member can be controlled by an individual player.



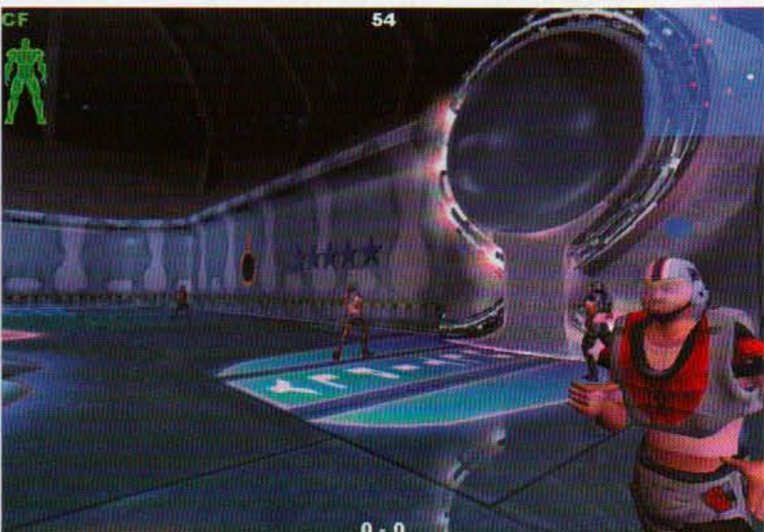


Hardware advances allow the clean, crisp aesthetic that typified *Deluxe* to be reintroduced in 3D for *Arena*



Ed Bartlett is aspiring to imbue *Speedball Arena* with an 'easy to pick up, hard to master' control system

While the scope of this element in terms of leagues, transfer lists and the like is yet to be confirmed – it rather depends on the ambition of *Arena*'s eventual publisher, with the Bitmaps in negotiations at present – this new feature marks a genuine progression for the series. "This was one of the first things I researched when I started putting the concept for *Speedball Arena* together. I looked at reasons why many real-life sports wouldn't work online, particularly in a 'human only' scenario," says Bartlett. *Speedball*, with its anarchic, free-flowing melange of brutality and virtuosity, is tailor-made for networked team play. With a playable engine in place, the *Arena* team has plenty of time to tweak and polish such features. The prognosis, then, is good. Expect a more detailed appraisal once network code is in place.



The decision to produce a playable version of *Speedball Arena* so far prior to its release may prove to be a masterstroke by the Bitmaps. They have a year, effectively, to playtest it to perfection – a genuine luxury

Sporting behaviour

Creating a fully-multiplayer sport, even a futuristic fantasy game, is clearly more difficult than many would imagine. How can developers prevent, for example, players accreting into a rugby-style ruck? To counter attempts to effectively 'break' *Speedball Arena* with unorthodox, unsportsmanlike tactics, Bartlett promises a seamless 'robo-ref' punishment system, clearly-defined player abilities and 'sin bins' for those who transgress the, admittedly few, rules.



Battle Hoshin



Format: GameCub
Publisher: Koe
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: Spring (Japar

Koei continues to refine its battlefield action subgenre and, with the younger GameCube player in mind, the emphasis is on mind-altering combo effects rather than mind-bending strategy...





***Battle Hoshin* takes the crowded battles fields of *Dynasty Warriors*, but the character design has been softened for a more kawai feel**

Historical warfare has been very profitable for Koei with *Kessen* and the *Dynasty Warriors* titles reaping in the cash. But when the company decided to create a PS2 sequel to the rather austere and serious PSone battle sim *Hoshinengi*, the developer decided to put the emphasis on action rather than history.

Now a GameCube conversion of *Hoshinengi 2* is on the way with a new title, *Battle Hoshin*, younger super-deformed characters and the fighting-centred gameplay very much intact. As with *Dynasty Warriors* the game takes place in a series of battles. The player has four characters in his team, and direct control over one of them. The aim is to slice and dice through eight arenas filled with enemies of varying strengths. Throughout the slaying it's possible to pick up magic shells from defeated foes, shops or hidden locations (there will also be a link-up to the GBA version, *Magical Hoshin*, where more shells can be found and transferred). These items can then be used to power up your attacks.

Battles end with a boss encounter and it's possible to perform huge 30-move combos, accompanied by spectacular lightshows. This is easily the best looking of Koei's recent output, and if it plays as well, the company will have found another profitable offshoot to its own private mini-genre.



Building combos is an important part of the combat, emphasising the action-orientated nature of the gameplay. Each of the open battlefield levels ends with a boss. The dragon on the left would suggest these are massive

Riding Spirits

Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Spik
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: Spring (Japar

Most would be happy with a PS2 bike racer that just performs better than *MotoGP*. But Spike has greater ambitions – nothing less than *Gran Turismo* with motorcycles

After years of arcade-style motorbike games failing resolutely (and at times seemingly on purpose) to recreate anything near the feeling of travelling at 170mph on two wheels, someone is at last taking the genre seriously. And the ingredients for an authentic experience are certainly there. *Riding Spirits* contains no less than 200 up-to-date models from four constructors – Yamaha, Honda, Suzuki and Kawasaki. On top of that you can access 70 types of clothing, 60 helmets and even branded tyres from Michelin, Bridgestone and Dunlop. Bonus items are also said to be hidden away in the game – so no one can accuse Spike of scrimping on the raw materials.

The handling perfectly accompanies this in-depth styling. As in the Saturn version of *Super Hang-On*, you must shift the rider's weight as well as control the wheels. The shoulder buttons move him left or right, while up and down on the analogue stick lean him forward or back. This adds the element of balance, of course (although four-wheel wimps can switch this element off). Elsewhere, the screens reveal the detailed bike models as well as some luscious scenery taking in eight countries (Japan, England, USA, Italy, etc). **Edge** always thought it would be Polyphony that did the *GT* on bikes thing. Then again, it has *GT4* to be getting on with.



Rider and bike are animated as separate entities and have to be controlled as such, at last bringing the essential element of balance to biking sims. Let's hope the system works well in practise





The reverse view (top) and the flashy replay mod (above) are both reminiscent of *Gran Turismo*. It i clear which game Spike has squarely in its sights

V-Rally 3

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Undisclosed**
Origin: **France**
Release: **June**

Infogrames has surprised even itself with a potentially breathtaking new direction for its rally franchise. Could this be the standard-setter for the GBA driver? Early signs are promising

GBA *V-Rally 3* promises to be a no compromises affair. Although screen resolution is way down on a PSone title, the scenic detail is impressively dense. Judging by the road textures, it looks like surface condition will play a part in the action

Announced just a week before **Edge** went to press, this delicious looking GBA version of the PS2 title (see p46) is currently attracting reams of hyperbole from Infogrames staff. Developed by an independent Dijon-based team (sensibly the publisher is not letting on who, but apparently they were involved with the GBC version of *Le Mans*), it claims to be the first full 3D game on GBA. The title includes Carrier, Time Trial and V-Rally Cross modes with the latter two linked. You can also expect ten licensed cars (the Ford Focus is shown in these screens), 42 tracks and a series of twoplayer options.

Edge has only seen the admittedly very impressive still shots so far, but Infogrames claims the framerate is smooth and the feeling of immersion excellent – especially in the cockpit view. In fact, one insider told **Edge** that it was playing and even looking better than the original PlayStation *V-Rally* title – screen resolution differences aside, of course. With *Mario Kart* still completely dominating the driving scene on GBA, fans of the genre will welcome news of a more sim-minded rival. And it's great to hear the 32bit PSone, rather than the 16bit SNES, being used as reference material for a GBA title. Whether or not the title will warrant this generational leap in comparisons is another matter, of course.





Ten vehicle models have been promised although these shots only reveal the Ford Focus. Hopefully the other nine will be this faithfully reproduced

Broken Sword

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Bam! Entertainment**
Developer: **Revolution Software**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **March**

Never underestimate the seductive power of the mystery of the Knights Templar, as Revolution's superb adventure re-emerges for another stab at the console audience





The hero's quest to unravel the mystery of the Knights Templar will take him to locations as diverse as Paris, Spain, Scotland and Syria



The locations and characters from the 1996 PC original are all included and despite the time lapse the puzzles remain just as ingenious. Objects can be used in several locations and even combined to overcome the more convoluted obstacles

Fears that the point-and-click control mechanism would not translate well to the diddy buttons of the GBA have been assuaged. The preview code **Edge** witnessed of Revolution's most beloved game contains an interface which is both practical and elegant. Rather than blister fingers by moving a cumbersome arrow around the display with the D-pad, the player has direct control over the protagonist, as in Pocket Studios' excellent GBC version of *Alone in the Dark*. Cleverly, the right shoulder button displays all the 'hot-spots' on screen drastically cutting down on mindless wandering and having to press the action button next to every notable object.

Visually the game is superb with locations looking every bit as colourful and detailed as the preceding PlayStation version. Indeed, apart from the loss of speech the game is as close to an accurate conversion as one could dare hope for. Of course, this presents Revolution with something of a double-edged sword as fans of the 1996 version might feel little inclination to work their way through the title once more in miniature form. However, those who have not experienced the delights of *Broken Sword* before can look forward to a ripping yarn full of intelligent puzzles and snappy dialogue. Perfect for those languorous train journeys.





Photography: **Martin Thompson**

Inside...

Lost Toys

After getting off to a slow start, another member of the thriving Guildford development scene hopes to revive the Bullfrog spirit

This isn't the first time **Edge** has visited a Guildford-based developer. Criterion, Lionhead, Mucky Foot and, most recently, Big Blue Box, have all graced these pages on previous occasions. Such an abundance of development riches is largely down to the diaspora of coding talent that took place in the years following the acquisition of the hugely influential Bullfrog by corporate behemoth EA. But while Peter Molyneux's Lionhead might be the finance-page-friendly public face of the Guildford development scene, the likes of Lost Toys are more representative of its subversive spirit.

Founded by three ex-Bullfrog employees, Lost Toys was established out of a desire to return to the small-team creative informality that were crucial to the success of the British codeshop. Though it got off to a slightly shaky start when its debut title, *MoHo*, was less successful than expected, the company is hoping for more success in reviving the spirit of Bullfrog with its follow-up, *Battle Engine Aquila*. Between them the company's three directors, **Glenn Corpes**, **Jeremy Longley** and **Darran Thomas**, boast nearly 18 years of experience at Bullfrog, having worked on titles as varied as *Theme Park World*, *Hi-Octane*, *PowerMonger*, *Syndicate Wars*, *Magic Carpet* and *Dungeon Keeper*. Corpes can even claim to have had code in every Bullfrog release until his departure – "which might be a bit tenuous in places, like a wobbly sprite, and stuff like that, but I also did the engine for *Dungeon Keeper*, and *PowerMonger*, and *Magic Carpet*," he explains.

Like other ex-Bullfrog employees who went on to start their own companies, the Lost Toys founders became disillusioned after the company was taken over by EA – they soon learned that their wealth of experience counted for naught with their new owner. Indeed while the acquisition of Bullfrog by the US publisher made sound business sense, little effort was made to maintain the working culture that had been a major reason for its success. "They

Four's Company

Messrs Corpes, Longley and Thomas aren't the only people to have left Bullfrog for Lost Toys. Game Designer **Alex Trowers** also worked at the company, which he joined in 1990, contributing to the likes of *PowerMonger* and *Syndicate* before returning to the small team fold at Lost Toys.

Why did you join Lost Toys?
The reason everyone was leaving EA was because it was EA, and not Bullfrog. It all became a bit corporate. Lost Toys is harking back to the good old days where there's a bunch of guys just making games for the sake of making games, not to appease shareholders.

What does your role as designer entail?
It basically means that I try to take the stuff that the programmers do and the stuff that the artists do and turn it into a game. There's a lot of feedback between all three groups, but at the end of the day, it's largely me who decides whether it's fun, and if it's not, then how to make it fun. I'm also responsible for designing the actual levels. There's a lot more technical stuff than there used to be.

What did you learn from *MoHo*?
As a startup company, we needed something on the shelf as soon as possible. When I joined the company there was a ball and a rubbery landscape, and the game consisted of manipulating the landscape, but we found that it was too hard for people to get their heads round the concept, so we started again from scratch. One of the things about working for Lost Toys is that it's one big office, where everyone can share ideas. The other key thing is that there's no lag in development. Five or six new features can go into the game in a day, be tested, and either be left in or taken out.

What is the most enjoyable thing about working for Lost Toys?
It's so relaxed. It's just like going back to the old days. When I started at Bullfrog, there were eight of us above a Hi-Fi shop. And I shamelessly admit that I'm harking back to that. Once you get down to it, gameplay is what's important, and it can be done by a handful of people.

Screenshots suggest that the small team approach is still capable of some significant technical achievements

"Somebody asked, 'Is Bullfrog f*cked now that Peter's left?' And that really pissed me off, because I know how much involvement he had on certain titles"

brought a lot of producers straight in, who didn't really understand the company," reveals Darran Thomas. "That's why a lot of people left, because the working culture changed quite drastically. I did get the impression that they started to expect people to leave due to 'natural turnover'." Which, as Corpes declares, was in itself a reason to leave. "They didn't seem to care that they were losing people. It seemed like their philosophy was to get the right project schedulers and four layers of producers. Which might work, but it's difficult not to feel that you could do things more efficiently on your own."

Things came to a head when *Indestructibles*, a superhero title that the trio had been working on together, got canned about a year into development. Though destined never to see the light of day now, it does sound intriguing. But their new bosses weren't easily convinced. "We just continually went through phases of trying to get it to go into full production," complains Corpes. "We'd go through one phase and then discover that there would be another one, involving some Canadian or American coming over. And it was only when we finished going through all these phases that we learned the whole company was being run by people who'd never had anything to do with the project who'd say they loved the engine, but then nick all our staff and leave us treading water."

Free spirits

With former colleagues gallivanting round Guildford like free spirits, the shackles of internal development must have been difficult to accept. "Looking back, I was inspired by the likes of Mucky Foot, because they'd be down the pub, and they'd be running their own company and doing their own thing," he continues. "It became quite embarrassing to still be working for the Borg. There was this perception that these companies were going back to the way that Bullfrog used to work."

This desire to develop the type of commercially successful but creatively original titles with which Bullfrog had made its name was central to the origin of Lost Toys. "There are many different ways of writing games, and not necessarily one right or wrong way," argues Jeremy Longley, "but we felt that small teams still have something to offer the industry, and that we could still work in that creative way that Bullfrog used to." Having discussed the matter among the three of them, the final piece of the puzzle came with the decision of Bullfrog co-founder, Les Edgar, to offer financial support – essential for any fledgling company. "We spent seven or eight months developing *Battle Engine Aquila*, and it was the best part of a year before we got it signed," remarks Longley, "and that's a lot of money. That's a big risk that we took to get that game signed. It's probably the biggest challenge of setting up a small company." No doubt having Edgar on board also calmed the turbulent waters of startupdom, as he could offer all sorts of advice about tasks such as paying the bills, talking to solicitors, and taking care of tax and accounting. It's difficult not to imagine, though, that Guildford and its development equivalent of 'Stella Street' was also important – particularly when Thomas admits to bouncing design ideas off Mucky Foot's Fin McGechie down the pub.

But setting up Lost Toys wasn't all plain sailing. There were lessons to be learned, for example, from the relatively muted response to its first title, *MoHo* (**E**87, 6/10). In many ways it's a title that was hamstrung by the instinctive conservatism that bedevils the current publishing community. Having started life as just a graphics engine and a control interface, bearing remarkable similarities to *Super Monkey Ball*, it transformed during the development process so it could be sold to men in suits looking for a product to fit predefined business strategies. Sadly, but predictably, such an esoteric concept was a difficult one to sell to a sector of the industry not best known for its creative imagination.

"Some things went well and others didn't go so well," explains Longley. "We got the game out on time, but it was too difficult for the average person to understand what it was that we were trying to do. That was probably the biggest problem with it. The lesson we learned is that you have to be absolutely clear about what you're doing before you start. We had some good ideas, but we hadn't fully thought them through. With *Battle Engine Aquila* we've spent a lot of our time and money putting together exactly what we want to do – the art style, the target audience – so that when we went to a publisher they could understand the vision from day one. They couldn't persuade us to change the setting or anything like that."

"One of the criticisms of *MoHo* was that the characters and concept were just too weird," agrees Thomas. "People couldn't relate to a wibbly wobbly world with robots running around on it." Corpes, though, offers an different interpretation. "I think the game is really good, but I don't think we'd earned the right to release a game like that. It's probably

FAQ

Company name: Lost Toys
Founded: 1999
HQ: Guildford, Surrey
Number of employees: 17
Softography: *MoHo* (PC/PS)
Projects in development: *Battle Engine Aquila*



Alex Trowers
game designer

Jeremy Longley
director, project leader

Glenn Corpes
director, lead designer

Darran Thomas
director, head of art

the kind of game that if Bullfrog had released it, people would have made more effort to understand it. And I think we fell victim to the fashions at the time when we had to bend it into shape to get accepted by publishers."

Media star

It must have been slightly galling then for Corpes to see his higher profile ex-colleague, Peter Molyneux enjoy so much success using his pre-Lionhead standing to push *Black & White*, particularly as there's a bit of history between the two. "Somebody on one of the PC games mags asked, 'Is Bullfrog fucked now that Peter's left?' And that really pissed me off, because I know how much involvement he had on certain titles," he recalls. "Some of them were entirely his, and he was working on them 14 hours a day, programming and designing. But others like *Magic Carpet* were very little to do with him, and he didn't have the same sort of input – the games were always designed by the lead programmer of the game. I've said things about Peter, and argued with him, and apologised to him, and he's apologised to me. It's not all his fault – the lead programmer on *Magic Carpet* couldn't be bothered to talk to journalists, and that seemed to set a precedent. So Lionhead was always going to get a lot more interest."

"It would be wrong of us to begrudge him that," adds Longley. "The attention Peter gets is good for the UK videogame industry – it provides the media with someone to identify with. But we've got to make the best of what we've got. We're really trying to leave Bullfrog behind. We want Lost Toys to be Lost Toys."

Hopefully the developer's imminent firstperson shooter, *Battle Engine Aquila*, will give a clearer indication of what the developer is capable of. Despite publisher Infogrames' reluctance to allow footage to be shown, it's







Battle Engine Aquila places the player in the middle of an epic conflict. If all goes according to plan, it will be like playing an FPS in the middle of an RTS

still a title that has piqued **Edge**'s interest. With *Halo* having set new standards and several other examples of the genre on the way, any new entrant needs a unique selling point.

Aquila's is that it pitches the player in the middle of an epic conflict. "You play a character who has been enlisted to pilot a prototype ship," explains Longley. "It's been built as the tool that's going to win the war – it's their only hope. The game itself takes place over a series of battlefields, with thousands of units on each side – planes, tanks, infantry, artillery, bombers, battleships – and you're in the middle of it with the biggest gun. You're not indestructible, but you are tougher than everyone else. Your job is to help your side to achieve victory, by fighting alongside them, and protecting them. You could decide to take out some artillery emplacements to facilitate your troops's advance, or take out some bombers that are harassing them. You can't take out the entire opposing army on your own, and you're not a general, you're just a really powerful war machine who can alter the course of battle." The game is set to ship for Xbox and PS2, with a PC version as yet unannounced.

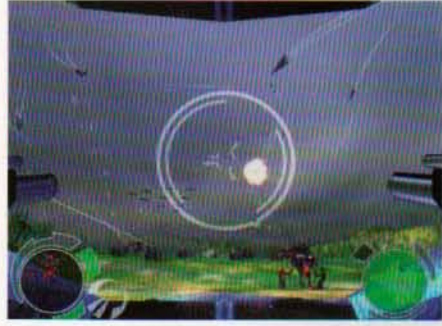
Old school

Getting the interplay between responsive, instinctive, blasting, and managing the tactical flow of conflict will be crucial to the game's success, but the team is confident that their old-school coding mentality will ensure the correct balance – as well as ensuring that the title pushes the current crop of hardware to its technical limits. "If you've got a small team of massively motivated talented people, I think it's more efficient than a production line system, because of the emotional ties that are formed with the product you're working on," argues Thomas. Informal working practice also allows swift implementation and testing of new features. "We've always felt it's important to allow the design to evolve – as long as you're not going off on a tangent and changing the direction of the project. So we've got a system where you can alter behaviours or troop placements and get feedback straight away."

"Working with in-house tools, with a relatively small development team, is really important for trying to keep as much stuff flexible and open. We really believe in doing stuff that's reusable, but also stuff that's based on systems," agrees Longley. "We build systems and then we build games on top of them. It's very chaotic in a mathematic sense of the word." With much of the code devoted to governing these systems, it's relatively easy to port the engine across both PS2 and Xbox, where it can then be tailored specifically. "There are already places where the PS2 version is working better than the GeForce 3 version, and there will obviously be places where the GeForce 3 is better," explains Corpes. "It's swings and roundabouts – where the PS2 can out fill rate the Xbox, the Xbox gets some of that back because of the multitexture ability, because it can do four passes."

Whatever the host hardware, it's important that Lost Toys delivers on the promise of *Aquila*. It's a title that has the potential to resuscitate the Bullfrog formula of diverting and innovative gameplay generated by an innovative and intuitive control interface. And in the current climate, in which next-generation promises have fizzled into conservative, risk-averse realities, it's important that the sort of wilful creativity exhibited by small teams of dedicated developers is vindicated.







Lost Toys is adamant that *Aquila*'s fundamental gameplay will be arcade oriented, though instinctive gunplay will be complemented by the demands of battlefield strategy

What Atari did next

The Atari buck has stopped at Infogrames, but what plans has the French giant devised for this aged intellectual property? And should we still care?

During one of many neon-saturated street scenes in 'Blade Runner', there's a moment where Harrison Ford pauses in front of a building that clearly displays the Atari logo. Several years ago one film pundit held this up as an example of the fallibility of directors attempting to predict the future. Atari was, after all, dead and gone. Now of course, to believe that such a powerful corporate symbol could die might well itself be held up as an example of naivety in the face of emerging brand power. Brand is everything these days – you don't have to plough through Naomi Klein's exhaustive polemic 'No Logo' to realise that. Just look at your clothes.

And let's be honest. Atari still has the most recognisable videogame logo in the world. The question is, is it recognisable for the

right reasons? Do today's fashion cognoscenti parade about in Atari T-shirts because Atari made cutting edge games, or because it's a kitsch piece of nostalgia, like carrying a Gola sports bag or downloading the 'A-Team' theme tune as your mobile ring tone?

This is the very question Infogrames pondered when, in 2001, it bought out Hasbro Interactive and found itself with 100 per cent ownership of the Atari name. The company immediately organised a survey asking different age groups on America's West Coast and in Britain and France what Atari meant to them. What it discovered was that among those in their mid-20s to 30s there was a dreamy nostalgia enveloping the name, while with younger gamers – i.e. the ones that now buy all the games – there was brand awareness, but no brand affinity.

"The target audience today has no real deep passion for the Atari brand, not like the 30 plusses. Therefore the brand values of the early days have no real meaning to the gamers of today," confirms Infogrames' vice-president of marketing, **Larry Sparks**. "So this gives us the ideal opportunity – and this doesn't happen very often in life – to completely re-invent the brand values of an existing brand, a very nostalgic brand. That's the huge challenge – re-inventing those brand values for today's gamers who really don't have any association with the '70s."



Larry Sparks, internationa[l] vice-president of marketing at Infogrames considers the brand value of the Atari name. He see[s] the label as a home for innovative new concepts.













V-Rally 3

Developer: **Eden Studios** Release: **June**

The rally market will be crowded on PS2 with *Colin McRae*, *WRC* and *V-Rally 3* all vying for attention. In this context, it would be tempting to write the Infogrames entry off as an underdog, considering the lack of a licence. But Eden has plenty of experience, and has had a long time to work on this game: the team was one of the first in Europe to receive PS2 dev tools and has used the extra period to build its own physics and 3D engines.

But, claims Eden CEO and game designer **Stéphane Baudet**, *V-Rally 3* isn't just about upping the technology stakes. The aim is to provide a new rallying experience and in this respect he sees the lack of licence as a plus rather than a minus. "It is good for Sony to have the official car liveries and driver names, but the licence also imposes on them too many restrictions – the kind of licence restrictions that have led the Formula One game into a dead end, where almost no original ideas can be implemented." Here, game modes include the usual Time Attack and Challenge, but both support up to four players. It's also possible to create your own customised challenges by mixing different tracks, and Baudet claims there's one further original game mode. "I think gamers are tired of playing the same games over and over, and the recent success of *Driver* is a lesson to consider."

Attention to detail also seems to have been a focus. Cars deform after impacts, and detachable parts will fly or fall off depending on the force. Spectators wave flags bearing the names of favoured drivers, who themselves appear in the game with their co-drivers, independently animated from car movement. The driveable areas beside each road have also been widened to get rid of the tunnel feel of *V-Rally* and *V-Rally 2*. And they've gone for quality rather than quantity in the game structure. "We reduced the numbers of every game element to make sure we could spend time polishing every track, car and special effect. Player's won't tell their friends about how many times they tried to beat the Germany Stage 2 record, but they will talk about when their car left paint marks on a rock beside the track."

So apparently this isn't just about hijacking a famous logo and sticking it on any old cartoon racing game. According to Sparks, what Infogrames wants to do is try and re-create the original Atari spirit and reputation, but with 21st century technology and for 21st century gamers. And this will mean only applying the brand to highly specific Infogrames products. He has a list of attributes on his desk that candidates will have to adhere to. He's looking for innovative gameplay, for products that 'make a statement, that are really category defining in their own right', and perhaps most ambitiously, Infogrames wants products 'that create a never-seen-before moment in a gaming experience'. In short, the previously unassuming French publishing giant now wants its own stable of next-gen *Breakouts*, *Pongs* and *Battlezones*.

This sort of creative agenda is not what gamers have come to expect from western publishing giants, French or otherwise. And it's easy to be cynical when confronted with such grandiose objectives – especially when the first title in Infogrames' Atari push was the so-so *MX Rider*. Sparks recognises this, but remains unrepentant, "Maybe we could have waited until we had an absolutely 100 per cent guaranteed AAA killer app to go out there, but you never know until that product ships whether it's going to be the hit that you anticipated. Plus we would have lost another six months. >

















Unreal 2

Developer: **Legend** Release: **May**

Taking the franchise back to its singleplayer roots, *Unreal 2* promises to deliver a strong storyline filled with plot-twists, rich character interaction and incredibly immersive planet environments. The key gameplay aim is to improve upon *Half-Life*'s compelling everyman realism. Naturalistic conversations can be embarked upon via a simple command interface and if you run off or even turn away when people are talking to you, they'll get the hump.

It's also possible to make alliances with other forces. You might, for example, be exploring an alien planet when you come across two armies blasting the crap out of each other – you can sit and watch the action or you can choose a side and get stuck in. And that favour may well be repaid later. The action is predominantly linear, with 13 missions to get through split into 35 levels. However, there are different offshoots to the main plot, depending on your actions. Mission diversity is also impressive taking in a number of diverse worlds and disparate objectives such as rescue the hostages, reconnaissance, search and destroy, etc. It's also possible to hook up with allied soldiers and give them orders.

As this is an *Unreal* title, technological advance is a key concern. The game uses the latest Unreal engine and according to Legend's **Mike Verdu**, "Key new technology features include a hundredfold boost in poly counts for environments and a tenfold boost in poly counts for characters due to hardware-optimized rendering; realistic outdoor scenery generated by a new large scale terrain system; procedural character animations and blending using a new skeletal animation system with component level controllers; and a particle system that allows us to realistically model smoke, cloth, hair, and breaking glass."

Finally, new weapons and aliens should add plenty of value to the package. The Izarians are insect raiders who hunt in packs and carry three-pronged laser blasters that fire thousands of deadly blue particles. There's also a race of telepaths, and the skaarj from *Unreal* are back. The new arsenal includes a biomechanical leech, and a bot that can deflect missiles or attack other players. Add to this a feature-packed multiplayer mode and complex computer AI and you get yet another promising addition to the *Unreal* collection.

So the view was: 'Don't do that – we need to start somewhere'. What *MX Rider* has done is kick-started the new awareness programme for the Atari branding and we're not too worried about anything else."

The A-list

Perhaps he's right. Gamers will soon forget a so-so racer, but the re-emergence of a familiar brand will already have burned into the collective consciousness. And later this year, Infogrames will do what previous Atari owner Hasbro consistently failed to do: attach some exciting, high-quality games to the franchise. At the top of the A-list perhaps are the three *Unreal* sequels, two of which are currently in the early stages of development, but already looking conspicuously gorgeous. *Unreal 2* is being delivered by North Virginia-based outfit Legend – previously responsible for *Wheel of Time* and the *Unreal Mission Pack*. Meanwhile, the Xbox exclusive *Unreal Championship* and PC sequel *Unreal Tournament 2* are both coming from Canada's Digital Extremes – a long-time Epic collaborator.

Several other titles have been earmarked as worthy of the Atari brand and are set for release later this year (see boxout). So far, the selection seems to conform to Infogrames' stern 'Atari equals cutting edge' remit. Each of the *Unreal* titles, for example, is using the









Stuntman

Developer: **Reflections** Release: **May**



Edge covered this scintillating driving game back in **E**102, but just to re-cap, you take on the role of a Hollywood stunt driver working through six very different feature films. The object is to complete 25 stunt 'missions', each made up of several sub-objectives. According to managing and development director **Martin Edmondson** progress has apparently been slower than expected due to the complex PS2 internals. "Overcoming the texture ram limitations involves making good use of other aspects of the machine's hardware to shuffle the textures around on the fly. This allows us to have quite high resolution textures despite the relatively small amount of VRAM." He also revealed one of the driving challenges which can be unlocked during the game. "It takes place in the arena. A number of barrels have been 'hidden' and you have a time limit to find them all. The reason this is a challenge is down to the positioning of the barrels – one is at the top of a giant loop the loop, another is midway between a huge jump, another in the middle of a burning hoop, and so on." Watch out also for the crazed, *Driver*-style handling and an advanced vehicle dynamics engine for authentic tumbles. JG Ballard will love it

latest build of the legendary Unreal engine, and the PC-bound titles, *Unreal 2* and *Unreal Tournament 2*, will both be exploiting the most advanced features of the very latest graphics hardware. (The original *Unreal* was of course a technical marvel, the first PC title to truly utilise the atmospheric possibilities of coloured and real-time lighting.) Plus, throughout the development process, Epic – no doubt guarding its *Unreal* babies like an over-protective lioness – is making continual code-drops, firing off new routines and effects for inclusion in the games.

Unreal effects

Not that Legend and Digital Extremes are mere code monkeys. In his online Unreal Engine diary earlier this year, Mark Rein singled out Steve Sinclair of the latter company for his groundbreaking dynamic particle system. In *Unreal Championship*, if you disturb a cloud of post-explosive smoke – either by running or firing a projectile through it – the cloud dissipates realistically. It looks so natural, you almost don't notice it, until you realise how nightmarishly complex the maths must be. Geek boys who witnessed the E3 demo were weeping helplessly into their freebies. The particle effect has now been written into the core Unreal engine.

As for providing a 'never-seen-before moment', Reflections may just have that covered. *Stuntman* invites you to drive through the open doors of a moving ➤











TransWorld Snowboarding

Developer: **Housemarque** Release: **September**

Veteran Scandinavian outfit Housemarque has already cut its snowboarding teeth with the visually arresting PC sim *Supreme Snowboarding*. Now, the company hopes to bring its gameplay up to the same high-standards in this Xbox take on the genre. With several keen boarders on the design team, and full access to magazines and videos produced by TransWorld (the US extreme sports publisher), the game goes for a realistic, open-ended feel. Courses are up to 2km wide and 4km long allowing players to chose their own routes downhill. "There are no artificial boundaries," confirm **Miika Tams**, lead designer, and **Harri Tikkanen**, creative director, "you just ride where you want to down the slope. If there is a fence blocking your way, you can always jump over it and find a new short-cut or a massive hidden kicker. Think about being able to clear a jump that's over 100 metres down, landing smoothly in the clear ice after a rocky wall, the character screaming in the air and after the landing waving his hands in the air with joy."

Importantly, Housemarque wants to simulate all areas of the snowboarding experience. Gameplay takes in downhill, racing and freestyling (tricks like flips, inverts, spins and rails are all possible, naturally), but the culture of the sport has also been explored with top riders and licensed clothing and equipment included. Finally, there's a rather offbeat power-up mode, "Here and there in the levels you'll see (usually very big) fires burning," explains Tams, "if you can jump a fire your board will catch it. This gives you a higher show-off multiplier for your points. So if you are able to combine a huge combo with a burning board multiplier a big score awaits you." Obviously, the slavish adherence to reality ends around about there.





goods carriage, to drive off a bridge onto a train, and then to watch your crazy stunts on a movie trailer cut together with footage of your own driving. *Terminator*, meanwhile, just promises to be as cool as the film. And if it achieves that, it need proffer nothing more.

New brand values

Together with the two extreme sports sims – *TransWorld Surf* and *TransWorld Snowboarding* – the catalogue has a kind of adolescent chic feel. If that's not an oxymoron. There's no *Jak and Daxter* here, no nods to Miyamoto. Why? When **Edge** asks Larry Sparks if Infogrames has any ambitions to take up the merchandising angle of the Atari brand, all becomes clear. "You can get Atari T-shirts anywhere. If you go on the Net there are so many non-official Atari sites and fanzines and merchandising outlets – and we don't want to stop what's happening, because it's still great promotion for the brand and for us, while we're creating new brand values. But we *will* take the Atari brand outside the gaming environment. There's a lot happening, and lot of it is confidential and that will be unveiled in due course. There's a more high-profile, more aggressive campaign that's going to be kicked off at the end of the first quarter of this year, and there will also be a lot of guerrilla activity associated with that on a world-wide basis. In the long run Atari













Unreal Championship

Developer: **Digital Extremes** Release: **September**

Championship is perhaps the most immediately intriguing prospect of the three *Unreal* sequels. Designed from the foundations up as a console game (rather than a PC game squished into the unfamiliar confines of a console), the title is set to be the first to support Xbox's broadband functionality. Which means it'll allow up to 32 players to take part in slick 60fps gun battles, across a variety of favourite modes (Death Match, Capture the Flag, Survival, etc). This, then, is an entirely multiplayer experience. The singleplayer mode is simply multiplayer with bots. It's *Unreal Tournament* on Xbox. Well almost.

The key difference is the 'designed for console' bit. In a brave bid to except the restrictions of the joypad (rather than pretending it really *is* as minutely intuitive as a keyboard and mouse combo), the designers have taken a lot of the looking up and down out of the experience. Level design is based around a lot of flat planes, and where there are elevated sections you can usually see above and below you without having to make head-movements. On top of this you get a super-fast 180-degree turn button, and then auto-aim and auto-fire to address the vagaries of joypad analogue and the fast-paced, bullet-riddled desires of console gamers. This is FPS on ketamine: fast and stupid and dangerous.

In fact, the designers decided to go the whole hog on the fast, stupid and dangerous front and turn it into a team sport. In *UC* each of the game modes requires you to form a squad and battle it out against an opposing force. Each player or bot is given a role within the team depending on their strengths. Slow, heavily armoured thugs get defence, the guys with pace get offence and the skilled playmakers get the midfield (or 'roaming' role as it's known here). To fit in with the *Unreal* universe, you can recruit team members from seven different worlds, each offering 7–8 selectable characters. This is a completely new cast of species, each reflecting the unique themes of their environments. The desert planet Anubis offers up fighters resembling ancient Egyptian gods, while an inferno-style world is populated by leather-clad S&M scaries. Offering up 30 diverse levels and 11 new weapons, *UC* has the impressive gameplay credentials to back up its amazing good looks. The only question mark hangs over whether multiplayer gaming on a console is actually going to work.

"*Unreal Championship* will be just as compelling a game whether you're playing online or not," reckons **Mark Rein**, vice-president of Epic Games. "Digital Extremes and Epic proved with *Unreal Tournament* we could deliver addictive online-style gameplay regardless of whether users actually played online. Between PC, Mac and consoles we sold around 2.5 million copies but only a small percentage ever played it online. With *UC* the AI is even better than before and the game is designed to capitalize on the power of the Xbox. It will be a must-own game for action fans whether they plan to go online or not."

isn't just about videogames, it's about a complete lifestyle environment."

Offbeat ideas

Jesus, what are we talking about here? Sponsoring a few music festivals, or a full-scale infiltration of teenage culture with Atari-branded wares? Sparks is not letting on, so **Edge** changes the subject. With a commitment to innovative products, is there a chance Infogrames might turn its Atari label into the videogame equivalent of Fox Searchlight – an outlet for challenging, offbeat ideas? "Quite possibly, yes," is the reply, delivered in a strongly affirmative tone. "And this could either be through our own Atari labs or through encouraging new developers to come up with untried, category-defining concepts of gaming – it all helps instil the brand values we're aiming for. And content's king at the end of the day – so if any developer feels they have a groundbreaking new concept then, hey, we're open to discuss it with them. Definitely."

Edge is still worried, and still cynical. Eight years of listening to gaming PR does that to you. And what the hell are the Atari labs? Sparks conspicuously refereed to them throughout our interview. "No comment,"' he insists smugly. "Is it ten people or 100 people? Is it in the US or the UK? Are they developers or...", "No comment," he repeats. "So it's like Area 51, then? The >











Unreal Tournament 2

Developer: **Digital Extremes** Release: **Autumn**

The *Quake III*-beating multiplayer-centric FPS will return later this year, with 50 new character models, 30 indoor and outdoor environments, new weapons, and new game modes. **Edge** saw a very early pre-alpha demo, but already the graphical richness and physical complexity are awe-inspiring. What strikes first is the visual diversity. One minute you're charging through a murky bunker, lit only by orange shafts, the next you're out into incredibly bright sunlight, or a dirty brown alien industrial skyline with rain plummeting about you. To add to the environmental realism, Digital Extremes has included Maths Engine physics – on the snow levels, players leave tracks which can be followed by enemies, if you run through a pool of water you leave ripples which provide a clue to your recent presence for anyone following. The team is also hoping to add realtime death animations, so when characters are killed, their bodies react realistically, rolling down stairs or falling from walkways, hitting objects on the way down. Lovely.

As for the important bit – the weapons – a few favourites (assault rifle, flak cannon, grenade launcher, etc) have been updated. Most intriguing is the link-gun which allows up to four players to get together and combine their laser blasts to create one enormously powerful death ray. However, only one player will have control of aiming and firing, leaving the rest vulnerable to counter attack. Also interesting is the ability to combine each weapon's primary and secondary functions. For example, you can shoot a ball of energy, then switch to the laser pulse and blow the original ball up – right next to an enemy.

As with *Championship*, team play is emphasised over every-man-for-himself stuff, but here there's a stronger tactical element with more sniping. As for online play, Digital Extremes is determined to protect inexperienced players from thick-headed veterans who like to hunt down and slaughter newbies. Each player will now have a point value attached to them based on how many kills they've achieved. Bumping off newbies will gain you so few points its hardly worth it. Also new is the ability to use land- and air-based vehicles (all armed of course) to get around the larger arenas. Carnage has never been so interesting.



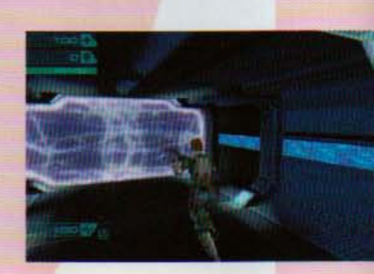


area 51 of videogaming," **Edge** offers haughtily. Sparks laughs, "Yes think of it like that. Area 51."

Half the answers

On the tube from the Infogrames offices in Hammersmith back to Paddington, **Edge** considers the prospect of Infogrames becoming the Sega of the western world, nurturing cool new ideas – putting its Atari brand to good, rather than exploitative use. Away from the confident marketing speak of Sparks and his commitment to 'establishing brand values', it all seems… extraordinary. At least those who were less than impressed with *MX Rider* and *Splashdown* can feel secure in the knowledge that the next seven Atari titles should be far above average – some may even be astonishing. And Sparks is not naive about what he feels Infogrames has set out to achieve. "You can't tell gamers today what's good and what's not good or what's cool and what's not cool, they have to make their own conclusions. It takes years to establish a brand, we've only had this baby for nine months – people shouldn't expect revolutionary things, this is more of an evolution. It'll take a number of years, but we're committed to it, and we'll do it." But what *exactly* is Infogrames committed to? Not for the first time in its existence, **Edge** feels – in fact, even hopes – that it has only half the answers.





Terminator: Dawn Of Fate

Developer: **Paradigm Entertainment** Release: **Q4**

Covered in **E**106, Paradigm's take on the *Terminator* universe is a thirdperson blaster set in 2029, just before the first Arnie is sent back in time. The mission-based, action-orientated game design makes three variously-skilled characters and 20 weapons available to the player – all of which must be pitched against a swarming mass of robots, cyborgs and battle craft. Fans of the fim will perhaps be most interested by huge amount of new Skynet equipment invented for the game, as senior producer **Francois Lourdin** explains, "We were given freedom by the licensors to answer lingering questions such as 'What did Skynet create prior to the T800?', 'What does a Skynet factory or time travel facility look like?' It's fairly rare to be given this kind of opportunity."

The shots on this page are the first to be taken from the Xbox version (PS2 shown in **E**106) and are pending Microsoft approval.





















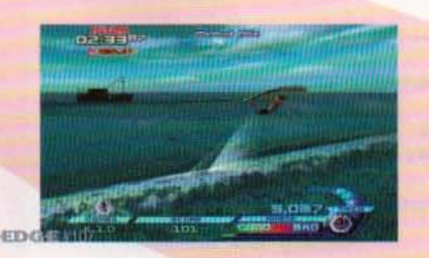
TransWorld Surf

Developer: **Angel Studios** Release: **March**

This impressive-looking sim is not the first surfing game, but it should hopefully convey the essence of the sport/transcendental pastime better than past attempts – it did need work when **Edge** played it towards the end of last year, however, although things are likely to have improved since. Taking in Pro Surf (career), Single Session and Free Surf modes, *TransWorld* aims to offer an approachable yet realistic experience. The broad range of moves includes airs, grabs, floaters and flip-tricks – all of which can be combo'd to your heart's content. But why should landlubbers be interested? "This is the first surfing game that captures the true excitement of surfing," says **Chris Kagel**, game analyst and production assistant at Angel. "The gameplay is much more intuitive and intense than previous surfing titles, and the multiplayer modes reallysets it apart."











Atari

A multimillion dollar dream turns into every investor's worst nightmare, a brand once synonymous with videogames finds itself the victim of a Teenage Riot, and S-Club 7 wear neat t-shirts. **Edge** investigates

When Paul Cattermole, one of the three male preteen catch-alls in snap-crackle pop-band S-Club 7, wore a lime green Atari t-shirt for a performance at an open-air Radio 1 concert in Bristol, he couldn't have envisaged the implications. Perhaps he was showing his loyalty to the long-dead ST, or maybe just following regimental retro-chic clothing advice. Either way, the fans hadn't a clue. Afterwards, one asked whether Paul *really* liked speed-techno fiends Atari Teenage Riot – the only Atari association made by today's musical youth. "I don't really know," the bemused eye-candy cautiously responded. "But I did play the computer game in 1987."

Nineteen-eighty-seven. Fifteen years ago, just after the launch of the ST, Atari was somebody. Now, some might accuse it of being a Trojan horse; a convenient brand name acquired by a big French publisher for the benefit of breaking the American market. Fifteen years ago, it fought squarely with Commodore for domination of a Europe nonplussed by Japanese consoles. Now, anecdotal evidence would see it as less widely recognised than an anarchic hardcore industrialist metal band from Germany. Still, 15 years ago, most S-Club fans weren't even born. A proportion of Infogrames' target audience won't have a clue what the three stripes mean. Time for a recap.

It starts in 1972, not with the Atari name, and not with the iconic 'Fuji' logo which, blazed in white on Cattermole's chest, confused 70,000 S-Clubbers, but with two men; Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney, and a startup tech company tentatively titled Syzygy. Call the name a hangover from the '60s – a syzygy is an astrological configuration, occurring when the sun, moon, and Earth lie on a straight line – but it was never to be. With that name already registered in California by a hippie candle company, Bushnell was forced to look elsewhere, to the Japanese board game Go, and the word whose nearest English equivalent is 'check' in chess: Atari.

Bushnell was the driving force. Disillusioned by the lack of success for *Computer Space*, his arcade version of Steve Russel's Mainframe shoot 'em up *Spacewar*, he blamed the incompetence of the manufacturer and distributor, Nutting Associates. Creating his own company was the obvious solution, and, after a few months surviving on income garnered from the local distribution of other people's pinball tables, Bushnell hired **Al Alcorn** to work for him. Alcorn's first project was to design a bat and ball game, allegedly inspired by a Magnavox demonstration Bushnell had witnessed some months earlier.

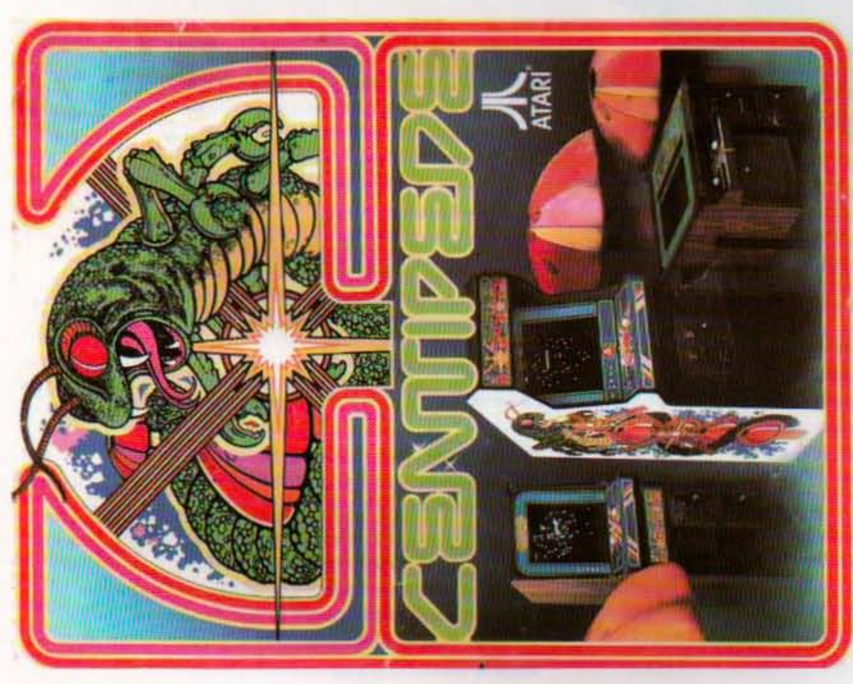
"My kid came home from school one day and said that Nolan Bushnell's daughter told the teacher that her father invented *Pong*," Alcorn relates to Steven L. Kent in his history of videogames, 'Game Over'. "Well, I told him to go to Nolan's daughter and say, 'If your daddy invented *Pong*, how come he had to ask my dad to come fix his machine when it broke down?'"

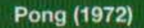
Pong's popularity was immediately apparent – especially to other amusement manufacturers, including Nutting Associates who made its own version, *Space Pong* – but the attendant publicity (and necessary marketing) brought the attention of Magnavox. It wasn't happy that Atari had, apparently, pinched the electronic tennis concept and made it its own, and begun legal proceedings against the California-based company. A guestbook for the Magnavox show in Burlingame









Pong (1972)

Console versions of the arcade classic were inevitably more sophisticated, putting varying degrees of spin on the concept. On offer here: (clockwise from top left) *Pong*, *Soccer*, *Hockey*, *Basketball*, *Volleyball*, and *Foozpong*.





Super Breakout (1978)

The sequel to the Jobs/Wozniak classic, perhaps *Super Breakout* wasn't as dramatic as its spaceman posters implied, but the precursor to *Cosmic Smash* offered a spectacular experience via psychedelic coloured bricks.




revealed Bushnell's signature, and, especially in light of Magnavox's superior resources, Atari was forced to settle. But what a settlement: for a relatively meagre licence fee of $700,000, it received the sole licence to manufacture and distribute *Pong* domestically. International rights would follow, and Atari's reputation as an arcade game producer, and Bushnell's as a canny businessman, was assured.

The next few years would be productive ones for the burgeoning development house. '73 brought a spin on the *Pong* concept, *Rebound*, a straight sequel to *Pong*, *Pong Doubles* and *Space Race*, an outer space racing game that Bushnell had been working on since Atari's foundation. In 1974, a fourplayer version of *Pong*, *Quadrapong* could be seen as confirming Atari's EA-like iterative intentions, but naysayers who questioned the possibility for variety within the confines of electronic entertainment soon had their doubts quashed by *Quak*, the first lightgun game.

Costly error

Two more games that year confirmed Atari's greatness, but also illustrated its fallibility. The original *GT*, *Gran Trak 10*, was the world's first racing game, providing a top-down view of a racing car on a oval raceway. The cabinet came replete with steering wheel, gear stick and pedals, and was understandably far more expensive to produce than anything Atari had attempted before. It was Atari's most successful game of the year, but, thanks to an accounting error, sold at a value $100 less than its production price.

But perhaps more telling is the story behind *Tank*, created by Steve Bristow, an engineering student initially hired by Bushnell to collect quarters from *Pong* machines. A primitive but successful recreation of armoured warfare, *Tank* was initially produced under the banner of an Atari subsidiary, Kee Games. Bushnell had created Kee to cement his domination on the arcade market – the thinking was that it would be easier to catch the attention of all outlets for games by coming at them from all angles. But *Tank*'s cheap and cheerful success, combined with *Gran Trak 10*'s underselling, soon made Kee a healthier proposition than Atari. It wasn't the first time that the enemy would come from within, but it was the last time there'd be such an easy get out clause. Bushnell panicked, and merged the companies together.

While Atari led in the arcade arena, the console war was just beginning. The first shots came in 1975 with Atari's Home Pong machines, which proved tremendously successful against the weaker Magnavox Odyssey. While it soon lost control of the home market to Coleco's home tennis Telestar, Bushnell realised the public thirst for *Pong* was fading. In 1976, the Atari VCS, a multi-game cartridge based system, appeared on the market, and Atari entered its Golden Age.

Simultaneously, things started to go wrong. It found itself financially overstretched, spending far too much on R&D and for the first time, but not the last, in serious financial trouble. Later that year, Bushnell was forced to sell the company to Time Warner, the giant American media conglomerate, though he remained at the company as chairman. While the VCS was a runaway success, Bushnell himself soon had a falling out with his new superiors, and left the company in 1978. The same year, Atari released its first home computers: the Atari 400, and the Atari 800. The company's takings formed one third of Time Warner's total annual income; it was the fastest growing business in American history.

Interestingly, the only competitor Atari had in the home computing field was from the Apple II, a computer created by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, both ex-Atari employees and designers of 1976 Atari classic *Breakout*. Two different policies shaped the machines: while Wozniak and Jobs encouraged everyone to produce software for their system, Atari threatened to sue anyone who developed for the 800, assuming that the majority of revenue for a system would come through software sales. It was a well-grounded assumption, but, naturally, it impacted badly on the amount of software available. It made the 800 a less attractive machine. It hurt Atari.

The follow up to the 2600, the Atari 5200 SuperSystem, essentially an Atari 400 with twin analogue joysticks instead of a keyboard, was released in 1981 to widespread consumer apathy. The introduction of the analogue stick was designed as a response to the Intellivision's 16-way control, considered one of the machine's primary selling points. But the sticks were cheap, clumsy, broke easily, and all the 5200 could offer in the way of software was tarted-up ports of 2600 games. The machine was a commercial failure; Atari, undeterred, began to develop the 7800.

"In 1978, Atari released the Atari 400 and the Atari 800. The takings formed one third of Time Warner's income; it was the fastest growing business in American history"

Meanwhile, consumer confidence in videogames was on the slide. By 1983 – the year of the infamous *ET* incident – the industry was in a market-shattering recession. The American public weren't interested in buying games or systems anymore. There didn't seem to be any place for a new console in the domestic market, no matter how good, no matter how it was doing elsewhere. And, unfortunately for Atari, that was the same year Nintendo approached it with the Famicom.

Hiroshi Yamauchi, president of Nintendo Corp Ltd, offered Atari the worldwide distribution rights to NCL's first console. An avid Go player and expert strategist, Yamauchi-san figured that Atari's distribution network would get NCL's product across the world quickly and easily. Atari said no, and Yamauchi-san was forced to go it alone. The Famicom, rebranded as the NES, received a US release in 1985. By 1990, there would be a NES in one in three American homes. Atari had lost revenue from over 30 million units.

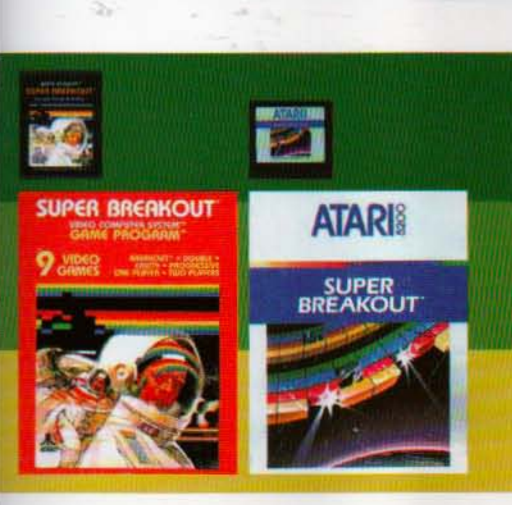






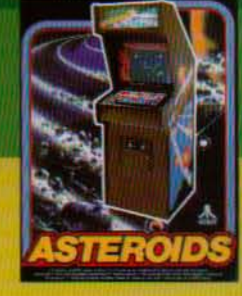


While Atari's videogame promotion techniques weren't as technically sophisticated as today, those who caught the promos for *Splashdown* may argue they were just as smart



Asteroids (1979)

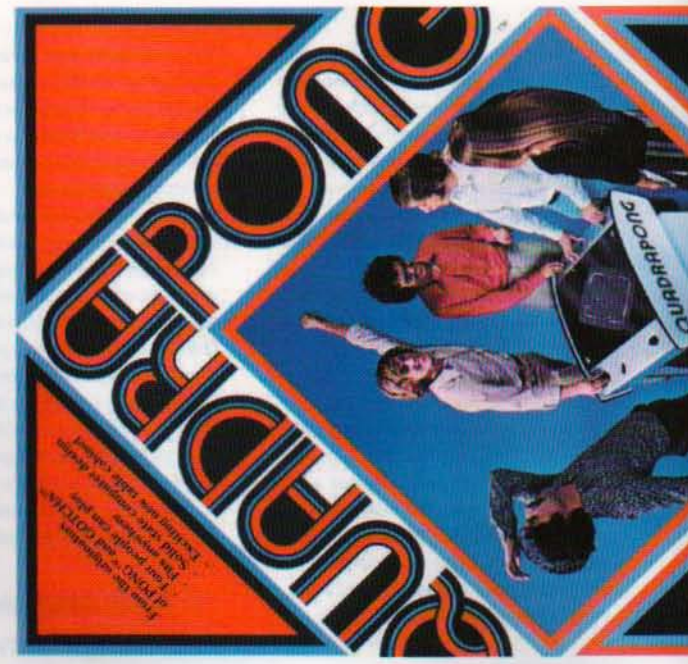
Those gamers fortunate enough to have played the original *Asteroids* will remember its sharp, bright vector-based imagery. Later console versions were less crisp, but equally addictive.

















Missile Command (1980)

Playing on Cold War tension and anxieties, *Missile Command* saw players using a trackball to protect a series of cities from imminent (and almost inevitable) nuclear destruction.







Battlezone (1980)

Battlezone's wireframe 3D conflict, arguably making it the ancestor of all modern-day firstperson shooters, proved so stunning that Atari would end up producing a special version for the US military.





Following a 1983 loss of $586 million, Time Warner buckled, selling the majority of its stake in the arcade division to Namco, and the computing division to Jack Tramiel, recently ousted as chief executive of Commodore. The 7800, which had been touted as the next big thing since the Consumer Electronics Show in 1983, was shelved as **Sam Tramiel**, Jack's son and the new president of Atari, decided that Atari's future lay in the home computer.

Atari's penultimate console would eventually see a muted release in 1986, but it stood no chance against the increasingly dominant NES. After accusing Nintendo of violating American antitrust laws with its strict control over who could release cartridges for the NES – the very same practice Atari had tried to enforce with its failed 800 series – it turned its back on the console market entirely. By then Atari had more important things to worry about. The ST, emerging at the back end of 1985, was ushering in another brief age of Atari dominance.

In Tramiel's first year in charge of Atari, 1984, the company registered a trading loss of $62 million. In 1985, that figure dropped to a loss of $14 million. By 1986, the first full year of the ST's life, Atari turned a profit of $44 million. Which brings us to 1987, 15 years ago, and Paul Cattermole's hazy retro-chic memories of playing Atari: with 512k RAM, a colour desktop and – gasp – a mouse, it seemed doubtful anyone would want to play anything else. And then Commodore, Atari and Tramiel's bitter, bitter rivals, released the first truly affordable Amiga, the A500.

One of Tramiel's first moves as president of Atari was to bail a small hardware development company, Amiga Inc, out of financial trouble with a loan of $1 million. Under the strict terms of the loan the money had to be repaid within the month, but when that time elapsed it became clear that Amiga Inc, heavily involved in the process of developing the Amiga 1000, was in no position to do so. Sam Tramiel, seeking a quick and easy replacement for the failed Atari 800, appeared to have gambled on this, and made a bid for the company. But while he was trying to drive down the asking price, Commodore snatched Amiga Inc with a last-minute bid, and bought with it the engine Atari had marked for the ST.

War in Europe

Tramiel was furious, and instructed Atari's R&D unit to work flat out on a new home computer core. That core went from concept to production within a year, something of a rush-job, but still proved powerful enough to interest the industry. By the time the A500 emerged, Atari had already received heavy support from publishers, as well as ports of the titles in its arcade division, popular brands like *Gauntlet* and *Sprint*. It was the heavyweight format war of the '80s: the battleground was Europe, where the age of 8bit computers was coming to an end, and Atari was doing brilliantly. It really looked like it was going to win.

So what was left to do but return to their roots? At the start of the '90s, the console market was aflame with excitement at next-generation 16bit technology, and, as Atari began to suffer from the Amiga's steadily increasing dominance, Sam Tramiel set his dev teams to work on a console project, codenamed Panther and slated for release in late '91. After witnessing the impact of the Super Famicom and the Mega Drive – and launching a suit against Sega for infringing a series of its patents – the Panther was shelved completely in favour of a bigger cat: the more powerful Jaguar. It was unveiled at the CES in 1993, exactly ten years after Atari had shown off its last doomed console, to surprise and acclaim. The architecture was superb, and publishers were impressed, but the press were sceptical, and Atari was sounding more and more desperate.

"It was the heavyweight format war of the '80s: the battleground was Europe, and Atari was doing brilliantly. It really looked like it was going to win"

But the war was one of attrition and, gradually, the better design of the Amiga eroded the ST's lead. By 1990, Commodore's adopted child was perceived as the must-have machine. Consoles were no longer in the equation; the gaming market was split 50:50 between the two home computer manufacturers, but, crucially, the Amiga had the momentum, and its more considered design was starting to show.

Games began to appear on the Amiga before the ST, and while Atari fought back with the release of the STe in 1991, the addition of 1Mb memory as standard, a 4096-colour pallette, and a lower case 'e' wasn't enough. The architecture still wasn't as smart. The image wasn't as sexy. The business was dying, and, in 1992, Atari brought out its final attempt at computing dominance, the Falcon, intended to rival the fast-emerging PC. The public ignored it, and, that year, the resuscitated giant collapsed back into a loss of $76 million.

"Atari invented the videogame business," said Sam Tramiel in an interview with **Edge**. "The industry has been through a number of cycles and we are now entering the fourth. Cycle two was dominated by the NES, cycle three has been shared by Sega and Nintendo, and we have put a lot of effort into assuring the success of the Jaguar in cycle four." Despite Tramiel's protestations to the contrary, this was Atari's make or break product. In 1994 it posted a $49 million loss. It couldn't afford that again. It was do or die.

It proved to be die, of course. Despite winning its lawsuit with Sega, and $50 million – only a small surprise, since it was a clash between two increasingly incompetent management teams, and there couldn't be two losers – and despite having, in Minter's *Tempest 2000*, a game which genuinely deserved to be a killer app, the Jaguar just couldn't get the public's attention. Perhaps it was the stigma of continuous failure that had tainted the company, the same consumer fear





2600 boxes were bold and striking. Devoted retro collectors can still find shops which sell them as new

Centipede (1980)

While Miyamoto-san surfs *Pikmin*'s horticultural wave, the rest of us can reminisce about *Centipede*, the world's first garden-based shooter. Eliminate the bugs and see their corpses turn into mushrooms: this is biology in action.



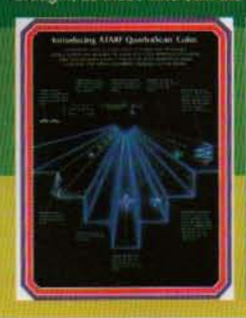






Tempest (1980)

Twitch gaming at its finest, Dave Theurer's pseudo-3D shooter was fast and electric. Oft forgotten, it deserves more recognition than Jeff Minter's dead-console ports have brought, as those who own the Nuon/Jaguar will confirm.





that would eventually seriously hurt Sega. Or maybe it was down to another of the things that hit the Dreamcast so hard: unfounded next-gen expectation.

Next-gen delights

While the world's tech-hungry gamers were tiring of the 16bit era already, Sega and Nintendo had reached such iconic status that they could keep gamers interested with vague whispers of imminent next-gen delights. Tramiel protested that Nintendo was trying to confuse the market with disinformation, and he was right, but Yamauchi-san's company wasn't the only guilty party. NCL did keep mentioning its Ultra 64 project, still three years away, but Sega's rumour mill namedropped the Saturn, and even electronics giant Sony announced its PlayStation intentions. With the promises of things to come, the Jaguar got lost.

And so did Atari, on Valentine's Day, 1996, and not with a bang, but a press release and a resigned whimper. JTS Corporation, a manufacturer of computer disk drives, wanted cash and an easy way of becoming a listed company. Atari offered both, and, by the end of the second quarter, found itself wholly consumed. While the official release stated that JTS did "not expect to sell the games division" of the now-crippled corporation, the liquidation of all Jaguar stock soon after confirmed Atari fans' worst fears. It was Game Over.

And the modern Atari era? Nothing. Virtually nothing, anyway. In 1998 JTS sold what was left of the Atari division to Hasbro Interactive, who released PlayStation versions of *Centipede*, *Pong*, and *Frogger*. The gaming world shrugged – this was a misjudgement from an out-of-touch company, ill-conceived revamps of titles whose time had long since passed. Infograme's purchase of Hasbro Interactive in 2001 lent new hope to the Fuji faithful, but, with the disappointing *MX Rider* and *Splashdown* only hastily branded in the Atari image at the last minute, it'd be cruel to judge the French rebirth just yet. However, it's certainly not the brand it once was. Just ask the S-Clubbers.



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Retail value
Get game and paddles for just



Gravitar (1982)

1982's *Gravitar* extended Bushnell's original *Computer Space* concept, in turn a derivation of *Spacewar*. Players controlled a spacecraft with rotation, fire, and thrust keys, much like *Asteroids*. And, like *Asteroids*, *Gravitar* was a vector-based machine. Later console conversions were disappointing.





Crystal Castles (1983)

A trackball-controlled spin on Namco's *Pac-Man*, *Crystal Castles* had the player charging round a maze and collecting dots. All very familiar so far, buts its multi-layered isometric structure amazed players.






EDGE
EDGE
real
3DO?
EDGE
face



Photograph: Martin Thompson

Vintage gaming

Chunky old cartridges and blocky graphics have never been so popular. But is there really any profit in holding on to that discarded Virtual Boy in the attic?

Hugh Scully would never have believed it. A queue forms near a small table in the Civic Centre, Torquay. But while the usual collection of watches, oil paintings and snuff boxes are being hawked in front of the BBC cameras, there is a mild buzz as someone places a copy of *Panzer Dragoon Saga* on the green baize table. By the year 2015 another resident expert has been added to the 'Antiques Roadshow' roster. No longer is the show confined to assessing the merits of 19th century bedpans and worm-riddled bureaus. No, silicon pleasure is now *the* collectible of the 21st century. While Eric Knowles caresses his Toby jugs there is another specialist reckoning the value of the Turbo Grafx PC Engine, *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* or a signed copy of *Metroid* by Gumpei Yokoi.

Far fetched fantasy perhaps, but interest in 'classic' gaming is definitely on the increase. In 15 years' time it is expected that the market will be incredibly active, with some retro titles fetching prices in the thousands rather than the hundreds. "The worldwide network of serious collectors are in contact with each other, sharing news and trading games," points out **Jason Moore** of 'Retrogames' magazine. "Events are usually run by die-hard collectors, and while these Lovejoy's of the electronics world continue to thrive, conventions are destined to get bigger and bigger."

Competition for some of the rarest games and consoles is becoming frenetic, fuelled in part by Internet auction sites and the craving for nostalgia induced by the new millennium. But it's not just about making cash. It seems that the generation of gamers weaned on *Jet Set Willy* and *Yie Ar Kung Fu* want to keep up with modern gaming and go back and collect every game that defined their youth. For true enthusiasts hoarding videogames is not an investment, but a way of tapping into their childhood.

Moore talks about the ability videogames have to transport one to the past. "Something on the TV was



The box cover of Matthew Smith's lost opus, *Attack of the Mutant Zombie Flesh Eating Chickens from Mars*. Just one example of rare videogame memorabilia. Image courtesy of www.retrogamer.co.uk

certainly enticing, but it was the comprehension of playing against an artificial intelligence which most beguiled me. Today, computer-controlled enemies are taken for granted, but back in the days of 'Tron' and 'War Games' it was a surreal experience. I have a catalogue of gaming memories, like the time that Dad brought home a bright orange Binatone TV game, or sneaking my Grandstand *Astro Wars* into the toilet for a private space battle. In the early '80s, your imagination was the key to a great gaming experience. My first handheld electronic game, Mattel's *Gravity*, involved catching LED lights by rapidly pressing the corresponding button. Add the vital imagination ingredient and suddenly you have been personally chosen by the imperial armada to save planet Zootron from evil alien boulders. Even the most rudimentary electronic brain can be compensated by an imaginative narrative."

While few actually think that classic games are more enjoyable than the likes of *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Gran Turismo 3* there is a widespread belief that the magic and innocence of early game design is fading away. The severe limitations of early videogame technology meant that games relied on abstract ideas for content. Games had to be immediate and compelling. Code a turkey and the results would be all too obvious. "People now realise there is much more to gameplaying than 3D texture mapped graphics, full motion video, and CD quality audio," points out **Simon Ullyatt** who runs www.retrogamez.co.uk. "Although today's games are awesome to watch, not so many are as fun to play. Jeff Minter once said that it takes real skill to make a playable and addictive game in 5k of memory. Today's programmers seem to be spoilt in terms of the resources they have to play with."

The real thing

Many believe that MAME (Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator) has been a significant factor in driving interest in classic gaming. Firing up the likes of *Moon Cresta*, *Skool Daze* and *Mr Do!* on an ordinary PC delivers a glimpse of retrogaming but does not supplant the thrill of playing on original hardware. "To see the screen shot or box art just takes you right back to those days," says editor of 'Retrogame' fanzine, **Keith Ainsworth**. "You get that warm fuzzy retrogamer feeling. Emulation isn't enough though. You just have to get your hands on the real thing. Slotting an Atari cartridge into the old woodgrain console is all part of the experience."

But for the really hardcore retro collector nothing quite surpasses the sensation of playing an original arcade game in its



Retro Collector and Retrogames: just two of the publications supporting the retro community



The 3D imager goggles, for use with the MB Vectrex, can now fetch up to £250





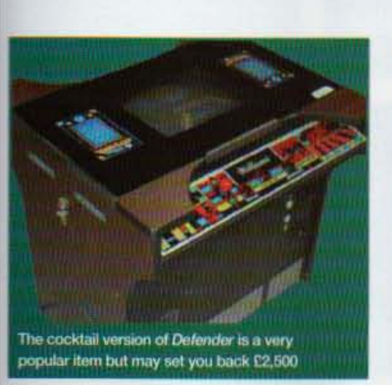

The *Samba de Amigo* package (top) is already highly desirable, while most of Treasure's games, including *Gunstar Heroes* (left) and N64 *Bangaioh* (centre) fetch decent prices. Expect the Neo-Geo Pocket (right) and its small catalogue of games to become a favourite of collectors in the next few years

original cabinet. **Andrew Macdougall** offers one of the first dedicated Websites for buyers and sellers of classic and modern arcade machines at www.arcadeaddicts.com. Many original arcade machines are extremely valuable, with the classics, in particular, becoming ever more sought after. *Space Invaders* will set you back £1,500, *Pac-Man* £995, *Defender* £1,700 and *International Track & Field* £1,500. There are other less expensive cabinets and the company even offers a hiring service for parties and events. "There is, and will continue to be, a strong demand for classic arcade games because the gameplay remains so different compared to today's beasts," says Macdougall. "When I first started off from a cold garage five years ago we turned over £500,000 in our first 16 months. But machines are becoming ever more difficult to come by and I find myself doing many more trips to the States."

Although the market is volatile, collectibility of electronic games tends to depend on three key factors: quality, rarity and sheer demand. Though an original Game & Watch version of *Zelda* in mint condition may seem valuable, the sheer number of units manufactured counts against its desirability. Indeed it would be easy to pick up this item for around £30. True value can be very relative, however. The Mega Drive version of *Gunstar Heroes* sold in large numbers, but the fact that it is a Treasure game has made it more valuable (worth around £30). Not so *Darius Alpha* on the PC Engine. When the game was released in Japan the only way to obtain it was to return competition coupons which came with the PC Engine version of *Darius*. Only 800 lucky raffle winners received the *Darius Alpha* hu-card. It now demands a price in the region of £600.

Added value

But what about the collectibles of the future? Even titles as recent as *Bangaioh* (N64 version) can now fetch up to £100. If you are serious about starting a collection look out for games which only received a limited run, were called back for some reason, or just didn't receive the marketing support anticipated; they are sure to become more valuable in the future. Sega's *Samba de Amigo* package (complete with maraca controllers), for instance, was only released in limited numbers (30,000 in the UK) and is already highly sought after. Neo-Geo Pocket games, too, are already becoming valuable since the premature demise of the handheld. The lesson is simple: don't get rid of any of your old games or consoles. Who knows, even that copy of *Conker's Bad Fur Day* may fetch more than the original £60 price tag set by its publisher. You can but hope.



The cocktail version of *Defender* is a very popular item but may set you back £2,500



Asteroids and *Space Invaders* can now be bought at Websites such as www.arcadeaddicts.com



Bargain hunt

eBay has opened up the world of classic game collecting to thousands of enthusiasts. Although some independent retailers, such as Computer Exchange and Gamestation stock retro titles, prices tend to be on the high side. Apart from picking up a batch of software or a boxed ZX Spectrum at a car boot sale, eBay is often the best place to get a lucky bargain, or at least get an estimate of the worth of your goods. Some titles are beginning to demand consistently high prices. *Radiant Silvergun* (Saturn): £130, *Secret of Mana* (SNES): £50, *Alien Vs Predator* (Jaguar): £45. Publications such as Retro Collector have even attempted to list the value of the most significant games across all the major formats. Though this, in such an nascent market, is an imprecise science.

New eBay bidders should be aware, however, that there are unscrupulous sellers who will happily take your money but fail to supply you with the goods expected. Thankfully, the feedback listed with each eBayer helps to determine the reputable from the dishonest – though spending large sums of money on Internet transactions always remains a risk.

Those interested in adding to or starting a retro collection can find a list of old, and not so old, consoles and games on the following pages >

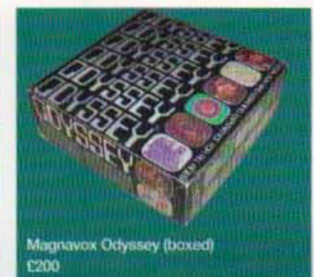
These are estimates of prices for goods in boxes and in excellent condition. If you can find any of the merchandise listed below cheaper, then don't complain to **Edge**, just snap it up

Magnavox Odyssey

Home videogaming began with this strange beast. Conceived in 1967 by Ralph Baer, the Odyssey didn't emerge until 1972. Although it could only display three dots onscreen at one time it had a successful launch shifting 100,000 units. There's little point in firing it up these days but the fact that it came before Atari gives it a high street value – if you can find one.



Year of launch: 1972
Market value: £100 (unboxed)



Magnavox Odyssey (boxed)
£200



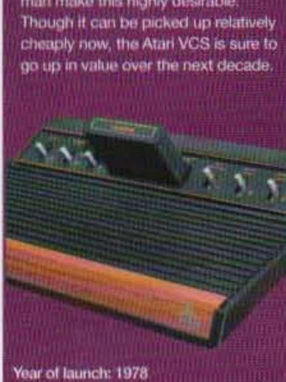
Haunted House (Magnavox)
Bundled with system



Various carts
£50 each

Atari VCS/2600

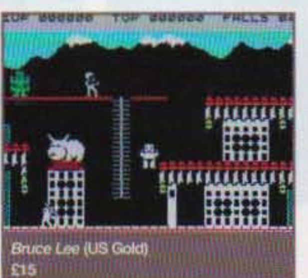
The woodgrain effect sends a shiver down the spine of any self-respecting retrogamer. Terrific switches, chunky cartridges and the most durable joysticks known to man make this highly desirable. Though it can be picked up relatively cheaply now, the Atari VCS is sure to go up in value over the next decade.



Year of launch: 1978
Market value: £50



Adventure (Atari)
£35



Miner 2049er (Tigervision)
£30

Bruce Lee (US Gold)
£15



Star Gunner (Telesys)
£40

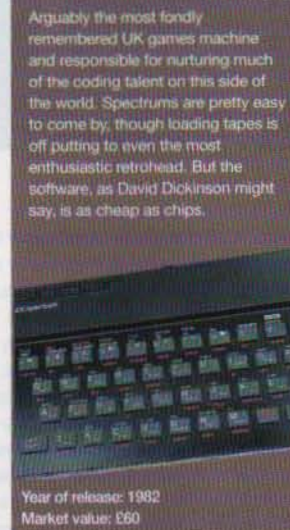


Laser Squad (Blade)
£10

Gunfright (Ultimate)
£8

ZX Spectrum 48k

Arguably the most fondly remembered UK games machine and responsible for nurturing much of the coding talent on this side of the world. Spectrums are pretty easy to come by, though loading tapes is off putting to even the most enthusiastic retrohead. But the software, as David Dickinson might say, is as cheap as chips.



Year of release: 1982
Market value: £60

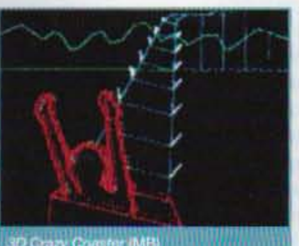




3D Narrow Escape (MB)
£45



Fortress of Narzod (MB)
£60



3D Crazy Coaster (MB)
£45



Year of launch: 1983
Market value: £200

MB Vectrex

MB's Vectrex may be a curiosity but the games are some of the most elegant to have ever graced a console. The clean digital lines dissecting the display are beautiful to behold. Like the Magnavox Odyssey, acetate overlays were used to add some colour to the purity but the system could never hope to take off against the more versatile home computers. A collector's dream.

PC Engine GT

Okay, it may require six batteries and costs more than most handhelds on the market, but the PC Engine holds a special place in the hearts of obsessive gamers. Good screen quality and some wonderful games make up for the short battery life and poor portability. *Darius Alpha* remains one of the rarest and most collectible titles on any format.



Year of launch: 1989
Market Value: £150



Darius Alpha
£600



Worms (Telegames)
£30



Lemmings (Atari)
£30



Dracula X (Konami)
£120



Salamander (Konami)
£30



Desert Strike (Telegames)
£15

Atari Lynx

Although Game have recently launched a new retro collection (including the Lynx at £35) the console is sure to become more precious as the years go by. There is just something uniquely appealing about the chunky design and Atari brand that makes this a good 'honest' item. It had a few genuinely good games too, such as *Todd's Adventures in Slime World* and *Lemmings*.



Year of launch: 1990
Market value: £35

SNK Neo-Geo

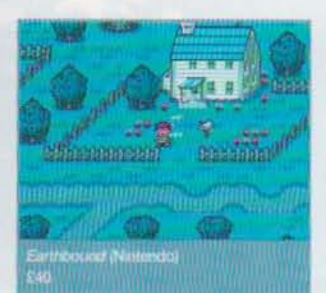
It was a mammoth machine capable of bringing arcade standard gameplay to the home. However, many of the games cost upward of £200 and it was never likely to become a massmarket product. Now the Neo-Geo boasts some of the most playable retro games around. It comes in two flavours, AES (pictured below) and MVS.



Year of launch: 1990
Market value: £1000



Fighters History Dynamite (SNK)
£50



Earthbound (Nintendo)
£40



Chrono Trigger (Square)
£70



King of Fighters '98 (SNK)
£80



Samurai Spirits 3 (SNK)
£60



Final Fantasy II (Square)
£60

Super Famicom/SNES

Probably the most fondly remembered console of all time and the one which weaned a whole generation on games before Sony came onto the scene. Although a SNES in good condition can be picked up for a few quid, some of the rarer games remain very sought after.



Year of launch: 1990
Market value: £20



Sky Hammer (Songbird Productions)
£50



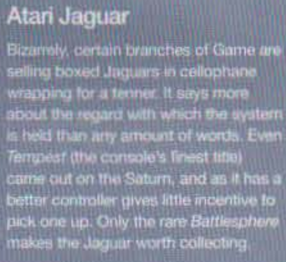
BattleSphere (4Play)
£145



Alien vs Predator (Fox)
£45



Year of launch: 1993
£10

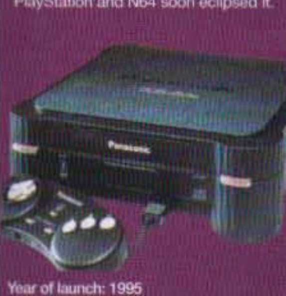


Atari Jaguar

Bizarrely, certain branches of Game are selling boxed Jaguars in cellophane wrapping for a tenner. It says more about the regard with which the system is held than any amount of words. Even *Tempest* (the console's finest title) came out on the Saturn, and as it has a better controller gives little incentive to pick one up. Only the rare *Battlesphere* makes the Jaguar worth collecting.

3DO

Trip Hawkins' plan was to create a powerful console which would become *the* standard gaming platform. But when it launched in the States at $799 there were few willing to take the risk. The 3DO soon dropped to $400 (and came in at £400 in the UK) but, although there were some good games, the PlayStation and N64 soon eclipsed it.



Year of launch: 1995
Market value: £40



The Need for Speed (EA)
£15



Return Fire (3DO)
£8

Dungeons and Dragons (Capcom)
£50



Wacky Races (Hannah Barbera)
£35



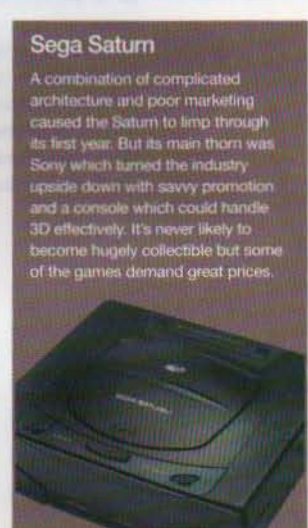
Panzer Dragoon Saga (Sega)
£100



Radiant Silvergun (ESP)
£130

Sega Saturn

A combination of complicated architecture and poor marketing caused the Saturn to limp through its first year. But its main thorn was Sony which turned the industry upside down with savvy promotion and a console which could handle 3D effectively. It's never likely to become hugely collectible but some of the games demand great prices.



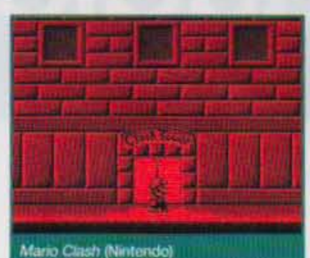
Year of launch: 1994
Market value: £25

Virtual Boy

Gumpei Yokoi's ambitious successor to the Game Boy has become the Sinclair C5 of consoles. Though the 3D effect is impressive and some of the games striking, the binoculars-on-stilts look was neither practical nor aesthetically pleasing. And then there were the headaches... a couple of years ago the VB couldn't be given away, but it's becoming more collectible by the year.



Year of launch: 1995
Market value: £70



Mario Clash (Nintendo)
£30



Wario Land (Nintendo)
£25

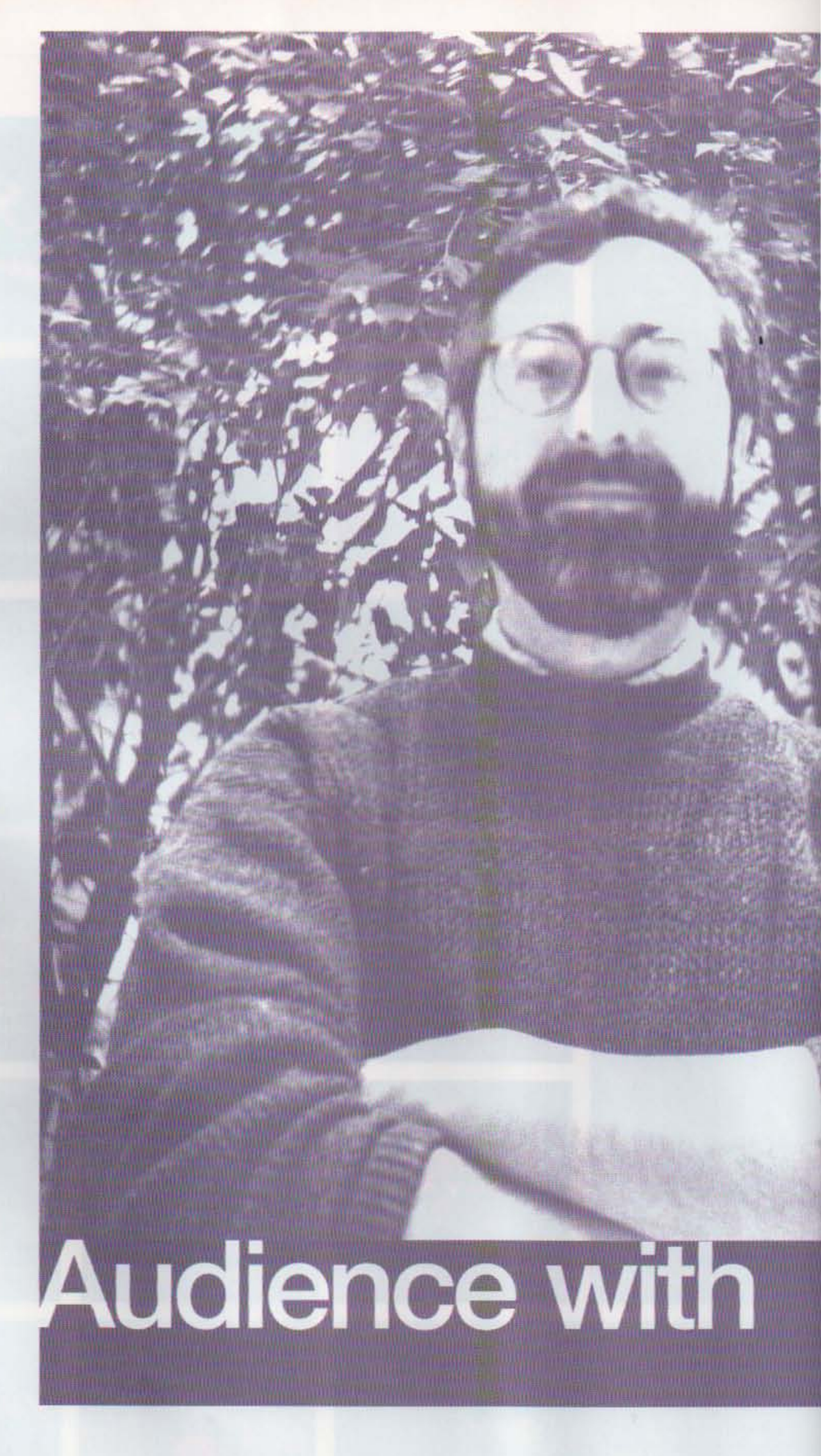


Galactic Pinball (Nintendo)
£15

Warren's World

Warren Spector was on course to become an academic until a job offer from Steve Jackson Games persuaded the self-confessed boardgame nerd to change career. A stint as editor of 'Space Gamer' magazine was followed by a spell at 'Dungeons & Dragons' creators TSR, before he made the jump to computer games. Starting out as an assistant producer at Origin Systems, Spector worked with Richard Garriott and Chris Roberts. He was also heavily involved with Paul Neurath's studio Blue Sky for which he acted as producer for Origin. Following games such as *Space Rogue* and *Ultima Underworld*, the studio evolved into LookingGlass Technologies, which Spector left Origin to join. LookingGlass went on to create classics such as *System Shock* and *Thief* before shutting down in 1997. Determined to start his own studio, Spector accepted an offer from John Romero to set up an office within the ION Storm operation. ION Austin shipped its debut game, *Deus Ex*, in 2000 which received both critical and commercial acclaim.

As studio director of ION Storm Austin, Warren Spector currently oversees the two development teams for *Deus Ex 2* and *Thief 3*. He also sits on the board of the International Game Developers Association, where he co-chairs the education committee.



Audience with

When did you first become interested in computer games?

As a player, that happened a damn long time ago. I played 'Star Trek' games on a mainframe computer in a newspaper. That was probably my first experience. But the moment I said, "Oh my god, this is the future," I was walking into a friend's party and seeing everybody gathered around someone playing *Star Raiders* on an Atari 800. You've got to picture 20 adults sitting in the dark, watching phosphorescent dots glowing. It was unbelievable. It was such a powerful moment. That was the point I realised, "This is going to change the world."

What was working at Origin Systems like?

I walked into the Origin offices full of piss and vinegar. I was going to show these computer game guys what interactivity and role-playing was all about. I walked into this situation where I was assigned to work with Richard Garriott on *Ultima VI* and Chris Roberts on *Bad Blood* and *Wing Commander*. It took me about a day and a half to realise I knew nothing. I learned so much; particularly working with Richard on *Ultima VI*. We sequestered ourselves away for six weeks and came up with the storyline and the plot and the quest and the quest objects and a list of NPCs. Working with him for that intense period, early in the project was the best thing that could have happened. Also getting the opportunity to work with Paul Neurath plotting the conversations for *Space Rogue*, that was my apprenticeship right there. You learn something from each project but I had never learned so much in such a short period of time. I'm still learning. Working with Harvey Smith, who was the lead designer on *Deus Ex* and now is the project director on *Deus Ex 2*, and Randy Smith, the project director on *Thief 3*, I learn more from those guys than I teach by a long shot. The day you stop learning is the day to find a new career.

You're very keen on stressing the team aspects of game development aren't you?

There is nothing more important than having a great team. One of the downsides of individual attention is that people get overlooked. I had a conversation a couple of years ago with Sid Meier about how weird it was to be a trademark. I hope to God I never see *Warren Spector's 'XXX'* on a game box, because you have six core people and 20 to 30 people slaving away on a game. And especially the way I work, which is democratic to a fault, I want everybody on the team to be able to say, "That is my game." For those people to be overlooked, it's just insane. One person doesn't make a game, I still see events in *Deus Ex* that I've never seen before. Steve Powers [*Deus Ex* designer] is insane. The stuff that guy manages to squeeze into a map is unbelievable. So it's all about team. If you have a great team and a strong vision, and everyone is aligned around that vision, you make a great game.

"I want everybody on the team to be able to say, 'That is my game.' For those people to be overlooked, it's just insane"

You're not a programmer yourself, so do you think technology remains too much of a focus in game development?

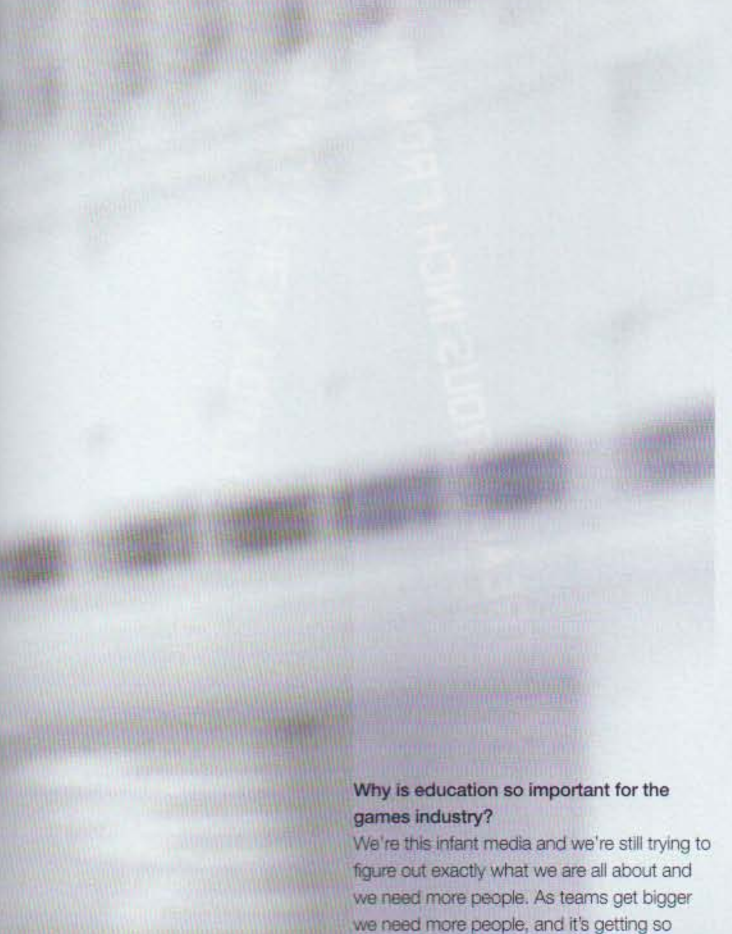
The fact I am not a programmer is a real problem for me. It's not a debilitating problem I hope, but it is an issue. If I were a programmer I could do my various jobs better. But we're still fundamentally a technologically-driven business. Look at the PlayStation2, it's a pretty tweaky little device and it's all about how you get stuff on the screen. But having said that, I actually think we are on the cusp of something new and cool and different. We are at the point where the big advances in game development are going to come on the design front. I hope you see some of that in *Deus Ex*. I know I look at *Grand Theft Auto III* and I see some amazing design work. It's a design triumph and I think we are going to see more and more people focusing on design as a discipline and as the driving force in game development.

It's interesting you mention *GTAIII* as it uses middleware technology, which is something you used with *Deus Ex* and are using with *Deus Ex 2* and *Thief 3*. How important do you think middleware is?
I honestly don't know. There is a part of me that hopes we end up with middleware robust enough so you can make any game you want with it, but the reality is we're not there yet. On *Deus Ex* we built on top of a very solid base provided by Unreal and did pretty well. But for all the freedom it gave us to focus on design, it did limit us in some ways. So with *Deus Ex 2* and *Thief 3*, instead of building on top of a base, we are looking at the toolset provided by Unreal Warfare and saying, "What parts of this are perfect for what we want to do and what parts aren't?" And the parts that aren't, instead of tweaking them, we are throwing them away and starting from scratch. For example, if you are making a shooter, Unreal Warfare is a great engine. But if you are making a player-centred, what-the-heck-kinda-game-is-it-stealth-combat-adventure-action-roleplaying game like us, we are doing all the AI, physics, sound propagation, object system, etc, from scratch. We'll see how this works but I don't think we will ever get to the point where it's like, "Hey, I am making a movie, let's go out, hire the camera and rent the sound equipment and all we have to do is point them in the right direction and it will work." I don't think we will ever get to that. We'll always be somewhat technologically driven.

"We are hearing from a lot of university professors that students are coming to them saying, 'I want to be the next Sid Meier or Will Wright'"

How much synergy are you gaining from having two teams working on the same technology base?
The way we have structured development is I have two programming teams, one for *Deus Ex 2* and one for *Thief 3*. For the first year I've had both teams of programmers working on our core technology and we are just coming to the end of that. Very soon the core technology both projects share will be done and the teams will split off and each team will start building the code it needs. So there has been amazing synergy but I may look back in a couple of years and say, "What kind of idiot was I?" I don't want the two games to be so similar that people go, "I already had that experience." I have encouraged the two teams not only to have their own team culture and working methods, scheduling and documentation methods but I am also encouraging them to go their own ways in ways that are probably insane. The AI is going to split off and each team will have its own AI coder. Interface stuff will be created and tuned for each game. If the teams look at each other and go, "That's nuts, why are they doing it that way?" I think that's the win for the players. Then they have unique experiences and not just a generic turned-out sausage with different plot and graphics.

What work are you doing with the International Game Developers Association?
I'm on the board of directors and co-chairman of the education committee with Doug Church [long-term Spector collaborator]. The core of our efforts are focused on working with educators to create core curricular. We want to give them the tools to use when they are creating courses. We're also putting together a worldwide list of game development programs so that people who want to get an education in gaming can find an appropriate course. We're putting together a list of books and magazines, educators can use. And in the US we're targeting high school career counsellors with information about gaming as a career. We are hearing from a lot of university professors that students are coming to them not saying, "I want to be the next Steven Spielberg," but, "I want to be the next Sid Meier or Will Wright."



So would ION Austin be able to operate as it currently is as an independent studio?

It would be too risky. Every once in a while, I sit in my office and think, "There are 63 people depending on me for their livelihoods. That guy over there has five kids, that guy just had a baby and those two people just bought houses." Being on a milestone basis at the moment, I want the full buy-in of my publisher and that means being a part of the publisher.

As a developer which focuses on singleplayer PC games, do you feel like a bit of a dying breed at the moment?

No. There may be a lot of PC guys worried that their games don't translate well to other platforms or other audiences but I genuinely believe with an evangelical zeal that we are making the right kind of games. Players, regardless of platform, want more freedom, more choice, more opportunities to express themselves, more opportunities to interact with the world in the way they want to. I do not believe that console gamers want dumbed down linear, action-oriented, Woohoo games. What I see is now consoles are powerful enough to support the kind of gameplay we have been working on for the last ten years. We have an opportunity to convert a lot of other people, millions of people, who never had the opportunity because they never had a high-end PC to experience the kind of gameplay we offer.

Why is education so important for the games industry?

We're this infant media and we're still trying to figure out exactly what we are all about and we need more people. As teams get bigger we need more people, and it's getting so expensive that I'm not in a position where I can take someone who is enthusiastic and interested and just train them. I am tired of training people from scratch every time. At this point we need to be laying the groundwork for the future when gaming will be an even bigger, more pervasive part of our culture. We need to start getting people trained reasonably. At the moment, there aren't a lot of people teaching kids about gaming who have actually made a game. Half of them don't even play games. We have to be changing that.

As ION Austin gets bigger in terms of staff, does the financing of the company become a bigger issue for you as studio director?

Well, Eidos owns my studio. It could call me Eidos Austin tomorrow and it would be okay with me. I don't have to worry about money in the same way as an independent developer would, but if I were an independent developer now, I would be very, very scared. The business is changing, costs are going up, which means risk goes up, which means fewer titles are making their money back. Certainly fewer titles are making a lot of money. You have some studios putting $50 million into a game – talk about crazy! So what you find is that publishers aren't willing to fund external developers at a level necessary for them to be competitive. I think you are going to see a lot of independent developers getting sucked up by publishers.

You always stress the importance of allowing players to find their own way through your games rather than there being a single developer-defined route. How quickly can you see developers handing over that power?

It's real important to strike a balance between the developers' creativity and the players' creativity. What sets gaming apart is that we are the first medium in the history of mankind in any circumstances, ever, first, number one with a bullet, that allows collaboration between creator and user. As the distinguishing characteristic of a medium we have to focus on that. But the exciting thing for me, as someone who has been evangelising this to the point of making other people sick, is that a lot of people seem to be getting it. Sports games have always been doing it. I look at the *Tony Hawk's* games and think a large part of the appeal is the freeform gameplay which is in the players' control. You don't have to do what the designer wanted you to do. You just do what you want to do and you get rewarded or punished for it. And what gives me the most hope is the success of *Deus Ex*. When we shipped it, we were all biting our fingernails, trying to figure out whether we had just doomed our careers. But people really got off on it, which was great – and then recently seeing *Grand Theft Auto III* – *GTAIII* probably embodies this better than *Deus Ex*. I think you are going to see more of that as time goes on. I hope so. Gaming's best hope for a grand future is to give people the power to decide how to interact with the game world.

> "If I were an independent developer now, I would be very, very scared. Costs are going up, and fewer titles are making their money back"

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's PC is an Intel 1.7Ghz / 1 Gig RAM / GeForce 3, kindly provided by **iwantitnow.co.uk**

Edge's most played

Jak and Daxter

Nothing new but beautifully put together. The perfect game to complete over the festive season? Possibly. Assuming the camera is behaving itself, of course...



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Saturn Bomberman

Two official *Bomberman* multitaps and seven crazy thirdparty joypads imported from Japan, all in the name of one of the finest multiplayer games ever.



(Saturn) Hudson

Skies of Arcadia

Men with bushy beards and metal limbs, kids with Sky Goggles and cutlasses, huge animals flying through the sky. It can only be another vivid Sega title.



(Dreamcast) Sega

Scrabble

Statistics as meaningful as any in the console war: PlayStation gets 16, GameCube 12, and Xbox, where **Edge** uses a blank as an X, scores only 11. Bias.



(Game Boy Color) Ubi Soft

You'll like this...

... if you like that sort of thing

The worst sentence in videogame journalism is this: "If you like that sort of thing, you'll like this." It's written again and again, but it means nothing – it's no kind of judgement, it's not informative and it's not critical. However, as with so much horror, there's a glimmer of truth within it.

Sometime in May, ignoring the almost inevitable slippage and strategic manoeuvring of the release-date, European gamers will get the chance to experience the next episode in Square's *Final Fantasy* series. For 40 hours, those with patience will sit through the same monotonously linear adventure, the same clichéd characters, the same hackneyed dialogue, the same pratfalls, the same payoffs. And there's no denying that many will enjoy it, too – it's more 'Police Academy' than 'Memento', but some people like that sort of thing. So they like it. No rocket science there.

But that whole attitude – that it'll do, that it's adequate, that it suits the fanboys so it's fine – is indicative of a community that should be demanding more. Thank the Japanese developer for the new true 3D landscapes, sure, but how about asking for the (mostly illusionary) freedom that incarnations of *Zelda* have been offering for years? By the time *Final Fantasy XII: Assignment Miami Beach* inevitably rolls around, **Edge** hopes it'll provide a singleplayer game that doesn't just appeal to the Square hardcore, but one that offers a greater spirit of adventure, as well as production standards higher than those of the local amateur dramatics society.

And just for the record: if you like adrenaline-by-numbers racetrack action, you'll like *Wipeout Fusion*, too. If you like *Ghouls 'n Ghosts*, you'll like *Maximo*. If you like platform games, you'll like *Super Mario Advance 2*, and if you like the idea of a two-dimensional beat 'em up with a handful of one-button kabuki-based moves, you'll like *Kabuki Warriors*. Well, maybe. Every mark **Edge** records is bound to cause consternation in some subset of gamers, but it's not **Edge**'s job to mindlessly advocate, and nor should it be end of the world if your internal mark disagrees with **Edge**'s assessment. If you like that sort of thing, of course you'll like that.

Who cares about 'like'? Gaming – and reviewing – should be about passion, about experiencing things that provoke opinion, not apathy. A six out of ten indicates that **Edge** found something to like in *Final Fantasy X*, but at 40 hours a shot, many gamers only have time to love.

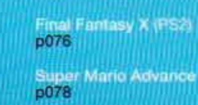












Final Fantasy X

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Square** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US), May (UK)**

Final Fantasy X is, as fans of the series demand, story-led. It is a good story – not a great one, still more soap opera than epic – but a good one. It concerns the importance of belief, and, while inevitably lacking subtlety, it raises questions worth asking. What price religion in the face of a society bereft of hope? If enough people worship something, does it matter how worthy it is? And for how much longer can the *Final Fantasy* series be held as up as a model of game design in the face of evidence completely to the contrary?

"The voice acting renders the pathos comedic, the comedy dead, and since emotion is meant to be the driving force, it butchers the game"









Final Fantasy IX's neat card game has been replaced with a turgid turn-based *Speedball*-a-like, which can be played at the save points spaced around Spira

Following the same formula as the previous PlayStation adventures, but exaggerated with next-gen insensitivity, the *FFX* feature list runs as follows: puzzles which involve little thought, but rely on systematic time-consuming trial and error; unbreakable animation sequences that initially impress, then subconsciously irritate; interminable FMV sequences immediately before unpredictably deadly boss encounters; infinite numbers of unavoidable non-threatening random battles; an utterly linear room-by-room progression mechanism; and, in Tidus, perhaps the most irritating lead character Square has ever conceived, a squawking, petulant teen who it's near impossible to care for.

And more besides. This isn't genre assassination – it's important to stress that there is a place for this plot-driven RPG dynamic – *Skies of Arcadia*, for example, is a more elegant proponent of the same ethic, and *Final Fantasy VII* offered some genuine freedom around a convincing caricatured landscape. But sequential software that labels itself next-generation should provide next-generation opportunities, not just exaggerate the mistakes it made on the last version. And while it's equally important to stress that *Final Fantasy X* offers a measure of entertainment, it's also just about as far away from game evolution as it could be. Square can crow about additional realism, about the polygonal replication of what used to be pre-rendered backgrounds, and it's right, *FFX* is prettier than *FFIX*. It is no better.

Like its forefathers, the turn-based combat is adequate, and though it's slightly more unbalanced than in the 32bit iterations, it's also fractionally more complex, and benefits from the ability to switch party members in and out of the action. Some will miss the active element of the battles, and others will find the sedate, logical approach more attractive. Really, it's the same as ever; match special attacks to enemies' weak points – and it comprises around a third of the game. Another third comes in sitting through the dialogue and cut-scenes, which happen almost every time the player presses X on an NPC, and the final third is in the character creation.



FFX's graphical splendour is obvious. Here, Tidus takes in the atmosphere of a forest-themed town. Unfortunately, interaction with the environment is sparse, mostly a case of pressing X on everything

For all **Edge**'s complaints about the structure, there's something compulsive about that last element. As ever, party members grow in stature proportionally to the amount they're used, and forming them to your own design is satisfying and works in the game's favour. It has the potential to make you care about your avatars, and for a while it works. Then the potential dissipates in every tedious, embarrassing, cut-scene.

While the plot's reasonably considered, the dialogue, both textual and verbal, is nauseating. **Edge** isn't aware whether this comes from the original Japanese script or just a mundane, foolish translation, but the voice acting, which is passable at best but risible in the main, only emphasises every clumsy syllable. It renders the pathos comedic, the comedy dead, and since emotion is meant to be the series' driving force, it butchers the whole game.

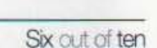
So, if Square's not going to do this properly, you wonder whether it's worth doing it at all, and that's a shame, because sometimes *FFX* is spectacular; sometimes the combat logic satisfies, sometimes the





Sphere puzzles can take minutes to solve, but sitting through the obligatory animations takes much longer

graphical splendour's enough to make you forget about the shameless X-on-everything faults. It's a matter of perspective, devout Square followers will spend 40, 50 hours inside *FFX*'s Spira, and hail it as the tenth coming, when all **Edge** sees is another bloated false prophet come to steal away your time. But poor scripting aside, the question's still worth asking. If enough people worship something, does it matter how worthy it is? **Edge**'s opinion: yes, it does, and ignore the acolytes. Some idols aren't worth building religions around.



Edge rating: Six out of ten







Some of the people Tidus meets on his travels speak Al Bhed, a letter for letter translation of English. Picking up textbooks hidden around Spira helps Tidus to understand what they say







Some key battles have extra fighting options – here, for example, Tidus gets the chance to talk his opponent into submission. It doesn't work, of course, but it does provide a handy strength boost



Sphere effect

Points gained from fighting are spent on moving round a complex grid of extra abilities, arranged like an arcane boardgame. Forks in the structure give the player some leeway in deciding how each party member is to develop – heading in one direction might lead to squares that enhance a character's dark magic, while another direction might make them a better fighter. But the base ethic of each of Tidus' co-fighters is broadly pre-determined by their initial location on the grid, and thus the system, for all its beauty, innovation, and tactile discovery, isn't any more flexible than the straight levelling from previous games.

Super Mario Advance 2

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£25)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**



The on-cart bonus *Mario Bros*, perhaps the first game ever where the objective is to get crabs. Who'd have thought Mario would be the inspiration behind *Leisure Suit Larry* and *Erotica Island*?





It's the sort of game you play in your head from the screenshots; jump on his head, wait for the blocks to move, and make your way up through the castle

Super Mario World holds a special place in the hearts of gamers of a certain age and format persuasion. It's a fondness which time has done little to undermine. While revisiting other SNES classics only serves to emphasise the gulf between this generation and the last, NCL's most polished 2D platformer only generates a craving for a form which has become deeply unfashionable. It may not sustain interest for much more than a couple of blissful weekends and is overly familiar for fans, but the magic is still there.

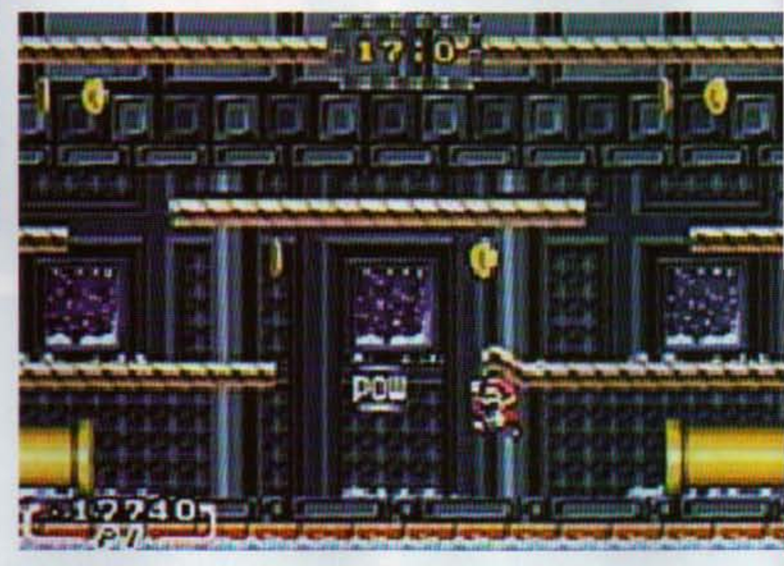
It's a magic conjured up through the loving care afforded to the characterisation and transformation of the species within the game. Yes, the controls are superbly simple, the balance divine and the variety of enemies welcome, but it's the tangible effect your actions have on the characters and environments which make *Super Mario World* so special.

Take any other platform game and enemies are dispatched with a simple jump, swing of a weapon or other similarly mundane action. But Mario's world reacts in a richer and more detailed fashion. Jump on a Koopa and it is un-shelled, leaving it naked and vulnerable to other effects. It can be stomped upon again, of course, but Mario can also pick up its carapace and use it to destroy a whole line of enemies. Shells can trigger other effects too, crumbling blocks, opening up secret areas or helping to find more coins and collectibles.

"It may not sustain interest for much more than a couple of blissful weekends and is overly familiar for fans, but the magic is still there"





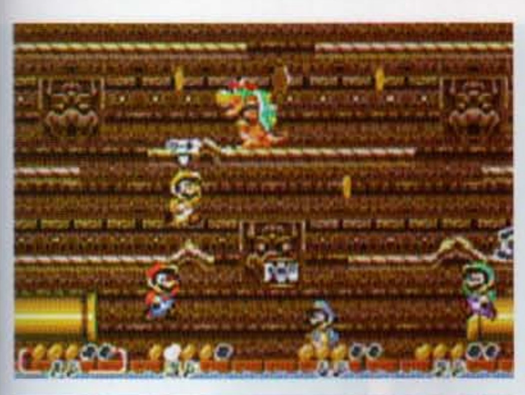


The levels/ladders minigame isn't why most people will buy *Super Mario Advance 2*, but it provides a neat enough diversion for those finding parts of Star Road frustrating. It helps if you find a Luigi

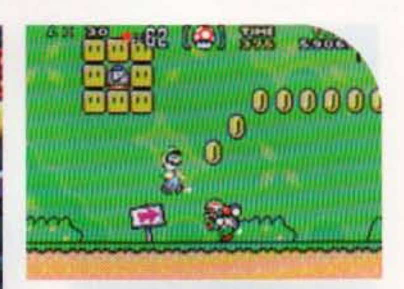
The power-ups are now taken for granted, but they are a crucial factor in reinforcing the sense that you are taking part in a multi-layered universe. Simple on the surface, but with an underlying sophistication, they evolve Mario (or Luigi, should you choose the high-jumping brother) through several stages: from mushroom-enhanced plumber to cape-wearing superhero. These transformations might seem tired to Mario fans but they add the degree of intricacy which puts the game ahead of its competitors. In which other platformer would you hope to find the possibility of breaking open a dinosaur egg to reveal a cute creature which you can ride, gobble up shells and then breathe fire-balls back at opponents? It all works beautifully and, more importantly, consistently. And it adds depth to a genre dominated by jump/punch wannabes.

In typical Nintendo fashion there are marvellous secrets hiding under rocks and bridges for the more intrepid gamer. Although the world consists of seven areas, separated by paths through Bowser's kingdom, diligent exploration will uncover short-cuts and hidden locations. Keys can be discovered which will propel our hero through giant keyholes to get him ever nearer to his goal. The sense of wonderment and discovery is never as intense second time round, but for those new to the game this is one of *Super Mario World*'s most delightful elements.

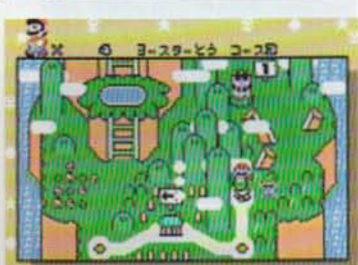
Apart from a visual makeover there are one or two additions to keep older Mario fans interested. The most important of these is the











Dedicated retrogamers will have committed Mario's map to memory. Others may find the exploration a more revelatory experience



A walk in the forest: while the characters are slightly pixellated, they've lost none of their charm



status screen which keeps a record of all the coins, times and bonuses collected. In addition, this time round, all 96 goals must be completed to access the 'alternate' world. There are also dragon coins (and princess coins once the game has been beaten once) to collect in every level. And the package contains the 1983 classic, *Mario Bros* in an updated form for some multi-link cable twoplayer action. Although a welcome inclusion, it palls in comparison to the brilliance of the main game.

Unlike *Mario Kart Advance*, which updated both the handling model and course designs, *Super Mario Advance 2* may just be too familiar to most gamers. However, it still shines and is yet another reason to own a Game Boy Advance.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



No matter how many pixel-perfect jumps he has to make, Mario always retains the same cheerful demeanour. Perhaps it's because of the joy he brings to gamers worldwide. Or limited sprite memory

Special powers

Yoshi can be a powerful companion during your adventures and is always ready to help you discover the eggs stolen by Bowser. The ability to ride on Yoshi and gobble up many items is an inspired touch which enriches the *Super Mario* experience. Once different coloured Yoshis have been freed they become available in the main game. Each can trigger a unique special power if enough berries are eaten.

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

Format: PC Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: 2015 Price: £35 Release: Out now






The missions take in a North African fort, a French town filled with tanks and snipers, and a U-boat base in Norway



One mission features two levels that allow you get behind the controls of a King Tiger tank. It sounds good but overly simplistic controls and foot soldiers, which are inexplicably hard to kill, manage to spoil the fun

Atmospheric and exciting, the original *Medal of Honor* and its *Underground* sequel delivered some of the best firstperson shooting available on the PlayStation. That's hardly the biggest of compliments, though – almost up there with best Dreamcast football game – and the PC, with its incurable fetish for all things FPS, provides a much sterner test of the franchise.

Fortunately, *Allied Assault* is up to the challenge... most of the time. Now, veterans can take it as a given that what worked well in the 32bit versions still holds up here. That sureness of touch with the World War II source material is evident throughout *Allied Assault*, from the tiniest 'clang' made by an ejected rifle clip through to King Tiger tanks rumbling through bombed-out French towns. Those close-quarters firefights with tactically astute stormtroopers remain messy, panicky and exhilarating. And then there's the sweep of the campaign itself, from Africa and Norway, to France and the Third Reich – all the bits the Americans turned up for.

The game's at its best when it blends the action of its predecessors with the more brutal realism of the Operation Flashpoint-style soldier sim

Yes, everything that distinguished the first two *Medal of Honor* games is here – the trouble is, for the first couple of missions you're left wondering if there'll be anything more. Aside from the evocative visuals and excellent sound, the only real sign that this is a PC original is the addition of a smattering of non-player characters and a session behind the machine gun of a moving jeep. It's neatly structured and, with only a nod towards stealth, delivers all the twitchy action you could want. But it's still very much a sheep in wolf's clothing.

It's only with the third mission – the much-hyped D-Day landing – that *Allied Assault* cuts loose. Closely modelled on the opening scenes of 'Saving Private Ryan', this is a breathtaking sequence to rank alongside any gaming set piece. The doors of your landing craft drop open, bullets zing past, your comrades fall and you have to race through the water and up the beach, with only scattered tank traps for cover. It's the same action and excitement as before but there's something else. There's an edginess, a sense of being in combat and it's down to one thing – scale.

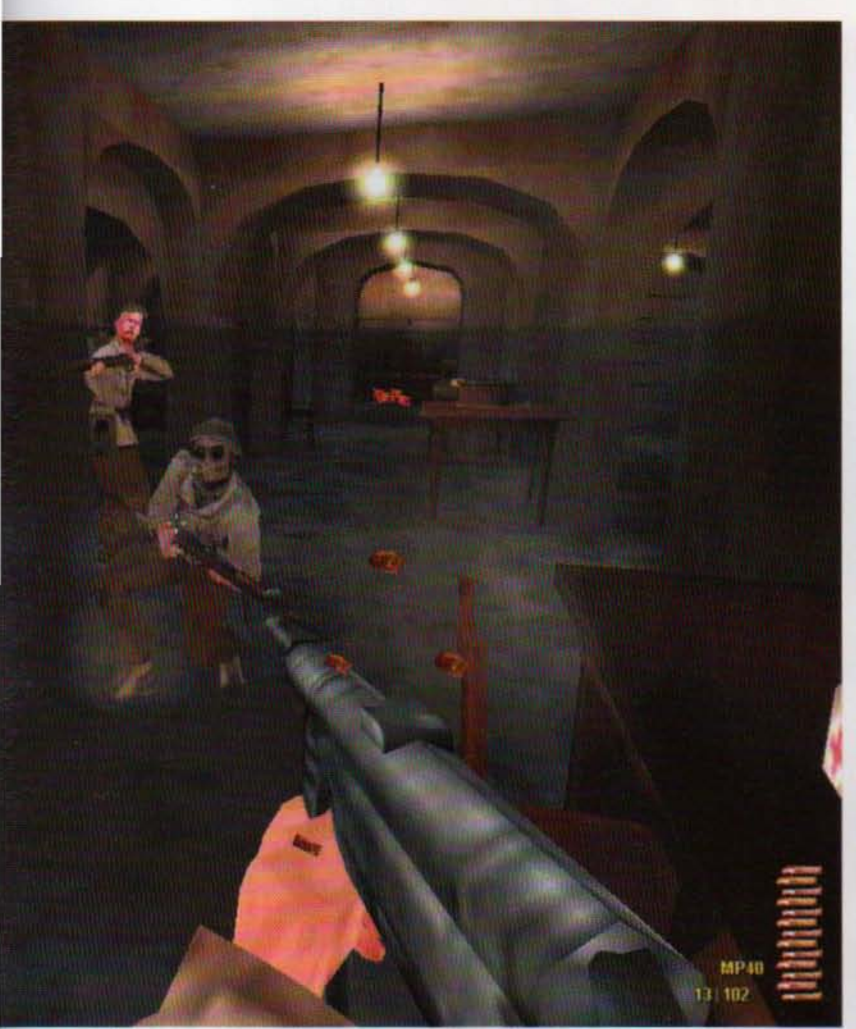
The craftily designed beach seems vast, with huge cliffs looming out of the mist and few hiding places. This creates an urgency absent from the preceeding levels. You feel as if you're in a real battle, instead of simply rounding a corner, exchanging gunfire with a few Nazis then moving round the next corner – the highly linear formula for long stretches of the original games.

'Saving Private Ryan' is again the inspiration for large parts of another mission, which has you leading a squad through a deserted town – deserted save for German snipers who'll kill you in a split second if you don't painstakingly check every possible vantage point before advancing. As in the D-Day landing mission, it's the scale of the town and consequent openness of play that clinches it. Gone are the tight, confined levels of the PlayStation – in their place, wide open




In the first mission, you rescue an SAS man, who then shows you how to avoid searchlights

Previously in E103



Taking the Afrika Korps' finest by surprise in a typically atmospheric *Allied Assault* location. When attacked, enemy soldiers will seek cover and pop out from behind objects to shoot at you







Take it to the bridge

In the tense climax of the fifth mission, the King Tiger tank, which your team has stolen, has to make it across a bridge. A bridge that's been rigged with explosives to stop it falling into Allied hands. Making your way to a high vantage point, you have to drop any Germans with your sniper rifle before they can make it to the detonator and blow the bridge. Getting a bead on these moving targets is tricky but if you wait until they stop at the detonator you'd better make your shot count.

spaces and no set route to follow. A later town-based sequence is even better, as it's garrisoned by stormtroopers and you can either carefully pick your way through it using a silenced pistol or open up with a tommy gun and take your chances.

General criticisms are those traditional PC shooter bugbears of on-demand quick saves and a massive arsenal of every available weapon. These are lazy design decisions that could have easily been avoided with a little invention, and the gameplay improved as a result. The same can be said for half of the missions, which stick to the old *Medal of Honor* blueprint, including the fort-storming ending – its corridor-based blasting is something of an anticlimax after what's gone before.

Make no mistake, *Allied Assault* is tremendous fun but even on the higher difficulty levels, it remains lightweight. The game is at its best when it aspires to be more than another *Quake III*-powered shooter and blends the action of its predecessors with the more brutal realism of the *Operation Flashpoint*-style soldier sim. When it sets its sights lower, it's little more than a slick PC translation of the originals. Obviously, that's not a bad thing, just not a truly great thing, either.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Reminiscent of a lightgun game, this section puts you behind the fixed machine gun of a jeep driven by your SAS comrade – all you have to do is handle the drive-by shootings

Frequency

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEA** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US)**

Typical: you wait and wait for something resembling the fabled Third Place to show up, and just as you're about to give up and strike it down as vacuous hype, two examples appear at once. UGA's synaesthetic shoot 'em up *Rez* proved equal parts dizzying and fabulous, and now Sony America's in-house rhythm-action project arrives and evokes similar transcendental emotions. Not that it's of concern to the majority of UK gamers, since the game is barely acknowledged by Sony Europe, let alone on the release schedule.

If the rumours are true – that the real reason for *Frequency*'s UK no-show isn't complex music licensing agreements, but the frosty relationship between SCEE and SCEA – then this is sulky self-mutilation on a scale you wouldn't believe possible from a successful multinational company. European gamers deserve better; they deserve more of The New, more of what Sony promised, which means they deserve the opportunity to play *Frequency*.

Frequency makes playing with music easy, thrilling, and compelling. It's a rhythm-action supergroup, and it's absolutely entrancing



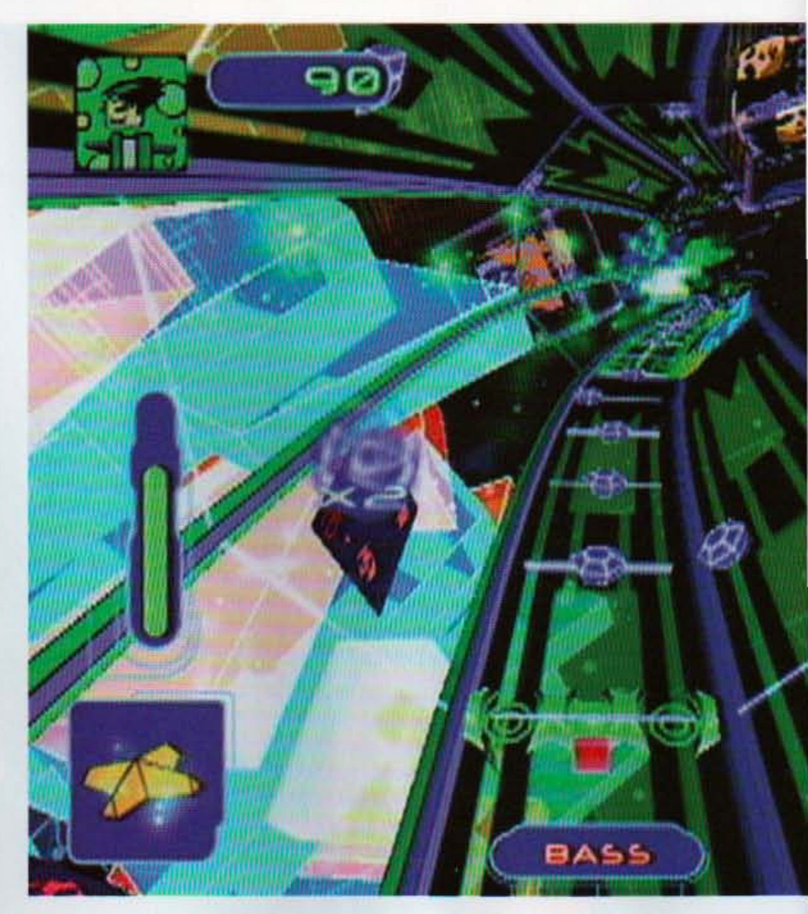




In multiplayer, up to four players compete to gain control of *Frequency*'s 'web'. In cooperative mode the only aim is to make beautiful music together

The first major rhythm-action game to emerge from the west – discounting Ubi Soft's child-focused *Jungle Book Groove Party* – *Frequency* is Jeff Minter's interpretation of *Tempest* rewritten in Bemani. The player controls a target which moves through a web-like octagonal tube, each side of which represent a different instrumental track. Tracks are split into bars, and each bar is composed of a series of beats on the left, middle, and right sides of the track. Match two sequential bars perfectly, and the rhythm will loop for the rest of the section.

So, the tracks start to loop and the song builds up layer by layer in whatever order the player chooses. Once a track has begun to loop, the player must circle round the octagon to another, with smooth gap-free transitions producing combos and increasing the score multiplier. While leaving a bar's pause between tracks provides a less frantic play experience, the points total suffers proportionately. Since bonus songs are provided for those who manage to score high averages across all the tracks, there's much incentive to return to an already beaten song and make some sweeter music.



If a track needs completing, it's highlighted in green. Here, the player awaits the next bar of music in order to lay down some bass. The bottom left of the screen shows a points multiplier, critical for high scores

The 27 licensed pieces of music cut through most dance subgenres, and none of it sounds out of place. It's a perfectly balanced soundtrack; Fear Factory shout "What's my Fre-quen-cee?" a lot over dark rumbling guitars, and are as ludicrously angry as you'd imagine, while Freezepop prove to be their inverse, providing tongue-in-cheek lo-fi moog electronica. Dub Pistols do cute scratched-up funk and Afrobatik's mechanical hiphop is fantastic as long as you remember to lay down the vocal track.

There are weak points, of course. No Doubt's ska-whine grates, and Curve continue to pimp their sub-Garbage speed wailing thing, but even those are okay, because it's hard to hate something that you're so involved in constructing. You bend the songs to your will, and while the tracks all, ultimately, combine to form the same tune, it's the route you take to do so that provides the hook. And when you finally get a song you *do* like...

When the Lo-Fidelity Allstars kick in with 'Lo-Fis in Ibiza', note-perfect dumb-grin euphoric house, and when you're in *Frequency*'s zone – when there's no thought between the action on screen and your fingers – when you tap out the vocals over synth over bass over drums – when the voice rises over everything else: "We're never going to let you down" – that's when you see it clearest. *Frequency* makes playing with music easy, thrilling, and compelling. It combines the freeform construction-kit elements of *Music 2000* with the rhythmic hypnosis of *Beatmania*, and places it inside *PaRappa*'s work/reward structure. It's a rhythm-action supergroup, and it's absolutely entrancing.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Maximo

Previously in E99










Every song is split into sections, illustrated by thicker, bordered gateways. At these points the tracks reset, and the player must build again




Autocatchers are power-ups that speed down a bar of music and capture it for the player. Used adequately, they can be live-saving. Used well, they can preserve combos for high points totals



FreQ out

Players are portrayed by FreQs, chemical-styled icons created using a method similar to the picture communication in *Phantasy Star Online*. These avatars caption the remixes created in Remix mode, a sort of freeform version of the main game which allows persistent track looping and more player input into section order. FreQs can also compete in the twoplayer mode, where players fight to gain control of each track; the musical backing in this is somewhat less coherent, though, and detracts from the multiplayer portion of the game.

Maximo

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), March (UK)**



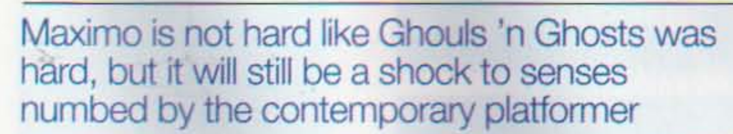




***Maximo*'s sound is a treat, with crunchy combat supplemented by undead pirates who mutter in slapstick seafaring slang, babbling babies and the ghosts of *G'nG* theme tunes past**

Maximo wears its lack of pretension on its super-deformed sleeve. Firstly, there's the minimal use of cut-scenes and FMV. Secondly, there's an unflagging 'Mad' magazine sense of humour that runs throughout its brand of gothic action and sets the game a world apart from the self-important solemnity of its survival horror stablemates. Thirdly, there is its official status: *Maximo* is billed as a mere 'tribute' to Capcom's *Ghosts 'n Goblins* titles, rather than a fully-qualified sequel.

The irony is that for all its humility, *Maximo* has plenty to shout about. It may be based around one hackneyed idea – the no-nonsense, all-action 3D platformer – but it implements it with enough style and invention to consign earlier entries in the genre to their graves. Superficially speaking, it duplicates the standard post-*Mario 64* platform blueprint to the letter, with four main areas each featuring a hub which provides access to several individual levels and, once those are completed, the area boss. (The fifth and final area, however, is structured less forgivingly.) Its locations – swamp, snow, cemetery – feel like old friends. It's all totally familiar, but utterly compelling. Although the standard fixtures and fittings of the original *Ghosts 'n Goblins* games have cluttered a hundred *MediEvils* and *Crash Bandicoots* since, *Maximo* manages to make the ghouls and gravestones fresh and funny again. It also supplements them with some cherishable incongruities: kisses, cheese and cow-print pants are among the optional extras to be discovered.


Maximo is not hard like Ghouls 'n Ghosts was hard, but it will still be a shock to senses numbed by the contemporary platformer

One other trademark of the earlier titles to have endured the upgrade is the emphasis on hard work. *Maximo* is not hard like *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* was hard, but it will still be a shock to senses numbed by the slower pace and endless extra lives of the contemporary platformer – the game punishes lazy play, and bad habits quickly begin to hinder *Maximo*'s progress. The cost of continues lurches upwards with every other use and game saves come at comparable prices. Even the 'home' hubs are alive with such dangers as stubborn armoured skeletons and sudden sprouting coffins.



The bosses in *Maximo* are reminiscent of those in Capcom's *Powerstone 2* – esoteric in style and great fun to look at, but lacking the firepower to and precision to be as fearful as they should

Maximo's relative strictness is not vindictive, though, nor is it a scam to extend the life of a game which could theoretically be beaten in little more than an hour. It's just another expression of the game's old-fashioned ethos. Its triumph is the way it resurrects the excitement of 2D platform experiences – the demand for constant concentration, the hazards approaching *Maximo* at all angles, the high-score sensibility and the frustration-exhilaration dynamic – and, consequently, it expects to be played attentively.

The most basic route through a level is only the beginning of the story. Walls exist to be smashed through, tombs to be raided, secret treasures to be exhumed. Sophisticated and extensive alternative routes abound, and all deserve exploring. Even the battle system, so often a hit-and-hope afterthought in such titles, is worth mastering – some undead drones are only vulnerable to specific attacks, blocking is singularly useful in mass-skeleton mêlées, and the game's superior controls extend to an effective Captain America-style shield-throwing move. Like his spiritual predecess Sir Arthur, Maximo loses armour when injured, which encourages improvised risk-management when he's down to his underwear and his last health bar (the maximum is four). A further significant touc is the way selections from the game's array lethal, light-spraying weapon power-ups ca be collected and reshuffled depending on their usefulness in a given situation.

Given the success with which *Maximo* grafts a third dimension onto time-honoure platform principles in other respects, it is all the more disappointing that the bosses are quite so easy to outmanoeuvre. All outlandi design and easy-to-spot attack patterns, they have plenty of charm but no clout. The anticlimactic impact is unfortunate, but har fatal – as long as there is still one last chest unearth or one out-of-reach heart to risk life and limb for, *Maximo* remains almost impossible to resist.

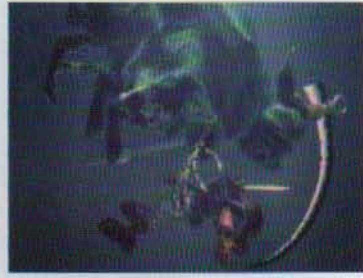
Edge rating: Seven out of t

Previously in E99, E103, E104







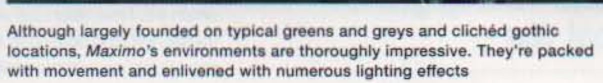


Attention to detail extends beyond the game proper to its presentation, all the way from the introductory tombstone menu screen to the cackling figure of Death who arises at the 'continue' screen to collect coins in exchange for another chance, or simply dispense final justice if the toll cannot be paid









Although largely founded on typical greens and greys and clichéd gothic locations, *Maximo*'s environments are thoroughly impressive. They're packed with movement and enlivened with numerous lighting effects



Better by design

As a piece of user-friendly design, *Maximo* puts similarly-styled Capcom adventures such as *Devil May Cry* to shame. Analogue control is simple and responsive and combat controls are satisfyingly solid. Shoulder buttons can be utilised for static firstperson views or for re-righting the camera behind Maximo and in the main, their combined effect is to significantly diminish the usual viewpoint problems associated with 3D platformers. At one point, having been slimed by a green swamp ghost, Maximo temporarily becomes a stiff-limbed, barely-controllable zombie. Perhaps intentionally, as for some the experience will seem eerily reminiscent of trying to get characters to move where you want them to in *Resident Evil*.

Wipeout Fusion

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **In-house (Studio Liverpool)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**









Although most craft have different characteristics the handling is a little sluggish. Sticking to walls and barriers can be a problem



Firing the numerous weapons can be as hazardous to you as your enemies. Hit an opponent's ship and it is likely to veer across your path and hinder progress. The game offers anamorphic and Pro Logic II options but no 60Hz mode

Your first impression of the much-vaunted *Wipeout Fusion* is unlikely to be positive. There are just too many design annoyances preventing the game from easing you into its universe of super-speed racing and bitchy combat. It's a major problem for Sony, as the original game was thought to be responsible for introducing a new generation to the delights of electronic pleasures. If those people were to playtest the fourth instalment of this popular franchise they might quickly put it down and move on to something more engaging. It's not that *Wipeout* is difficult, it's more that it's arbitrarily difficult.

Settling yourself into the cockpit for the first race in Arcade mode should be a thrilling experience. Instead, the sluggish handling model and almost magnetic-like manner in which the craft often sticks to the arena walls make for frustrating racing. Sure, some of these difficulties are overcome once new, more manoeuvrable craft are acquired and your skill base has improved, but the initial frustration never fully abates.

Worse still is the manner in which the rival competitors react to your craft and attacks. Although many high-powered, and often imaginative, weapons are at your disposal their efficacy is somewhat erratic. Firing homing missiles and grenades at enemies in front of your ship can be as detrimental to you as it is to them. Each ship has an energy level which depletes with every crash and bump. Hit an enemy enough times and it will explode, thus eliminating it from the running. This is great in theory, but often an enemy which you have taken out with a well timed missile, will stop dead in its tracks and merely provide an unavoidable obstruction. Often, damaged ships veer unpredictably across the track making evasion a matter of luck rather than skill. It's galling to see several competitors pass you by while your craft is stuck behind the hull of a vanquished foe.

The main problem with *Wipeout Fusion* is that there is a lack of focus and balance. It is neither a slick 'in-the-zone' racing game nor a frenzied vehicle combat title. The tracks are too narrow and the combat too disorderly to give players the opportunity to focus on fast lap times and peerless negotiation of the twists and turns. Just as momentum is built up, a log-jam of ships or an anti-gravity attack stops you from a smooth lap time. Equally, the combat is haphazard and progress to later leagues and challenges relies on the ill fortune of others.

These are the feelings that will grip you for the first couple of hours of play. However, persevere with the game and a sense of karma begins to take hold. The league system in particular is initially frustrating but

There is a lack of focus and balance. It is neither a slick 'in-the-zone' racing game nor a frenzied vehicle combat title

MotoGP 2

Previously in E84/E88/E99








There are a number of impressive weapons which can dismantle the opposition. These can be unlocked after winning league competitions

becomes hilariously captivating. Points are awarded for coming in the top ten with an extra two points added for every 'kill'. Unlike *Mario Kart* your opponents' scores are never calculated on the basis of your performance – they almost feel completely random. This means that you could be eliminated from one race, lose all the available points, but still win the league. Conversely, you could actually come first in every race, but still lose the championship. It actually becomes unintentionally compelling.

In its favour, the game is vast with many leagues, challenges, ships, pilots and weapons to unlock. It's just a shame that a few poorly thought out design elements prevent players from truly connecting with the game. Although the excellent trance-inducing tunes do much to capture the spirit of earlier versions, the gameplay has failed to keep up with times.

Edge rating: Five out of ten



There are some nice graphical effects along the way including trackside waterfalls and rain effects. The opportunity to occasionally take an alternate route is welcome but a sense of real drama is simply lacking



Dull duels

Wipeout Fusion's multiplayer games are a welcome addition to the mix. Players can challenge each other in both Arcade mode and the Wipeout leagues. Framerates remain impressively high, though the rather hypnotic blandness of the oneplayer game is enhanced little by the extra competition produced by a real-life rival.

MotoGP 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Namco** Price: **£40** Release: **February 15** Previously in **E**103









The twoplayer game, while decent, removes some sense of speed (above). An anamorphic option is present but not 60Hz display. Extra bikes unlock as you play through the generous Challenge mode – Arcade and Season remain

Wheelie good

MotoGP fans rejoice, for Namco has brought you the opportunity to take control of some of the series' most renowned riders. In Legends mode, past champions of the motorcycling racing world (such as Wayne Rainey, Kevin Schwantz and Mick Doohan) have been faithfully recreated, along with their signature machinery. Although you can't play as any of these in the main game, it remains a welcome addition that should obviously appeal more to followers of the sport.





The new rain effect (the sun always shone in *MotoGP*) is superb – easily one of the best Edge has seen (main). The action button allows new moves such as stoppies (above left). Trackside detail is impressive

Though far from disastrous, the original *MotoGP* (**E**93, 5/10) game was also a fair distance from being remarkable – too easy and often uninvolving, it failed to properly convey the essence – and, crucially, the excitement – of this fiercely contested sport. A shame, given the potential for a truly entertaining arcade-like experience the visuals appeared rather willing to support.

As is the trend, this sequel sets out to improve matters. The number of tracks has doubled, with Catalunya, Assen, Le Mans, Mugello and Sachsenring joining the original's (admittedly slender) line-up and there's a laudable additional play mode (see boxout), but otherwise the structure is identical.

Not so on the track, though. Top runners now offer a far greater challenge, ruthlessly regaining the lead the moment you fail to clip an apex – starting last and overtaking the entire grid before the first lap has been completed is now highly unlikely. Having said that, the opposition still suffers from unconvincing AI – you spend your track time feeling very much alone, as though in a time trial containing a convoy of lifeless obstacles. As in *MotoGP*, don't mistake their glance over the shoulder when overtaken on straights as an acknowledgement of your presence – their sole interest is in the racing line they've been programmed to follow – the personality-fuelled nature of real life MotoGP adversaries having again failed to make the start line. Combined with the inert depiction of collisions between machinery it tends to make matters feel rather sterile.

In the game's favour, your rider now feels more responsive and while it's still near impossible to play adequately using the digital setting, switching to analogue inputs has improved the bikes' braking ability and succeeds in promoting smoother play. This, along with the introduction of an 'action' button allowing you to perform wheelies (and stoppies) at will, thus enabling you to violently alter the direction of the 500cc beast between your polygonal legs in order to better negotiate the tracks' tricks, and the removal of some of the more annoying aspects of the original (such as the ridiculous loss of speed when off track), has done much to improve player involvement.

And while it clearly still has some way to go *MotoGP 2* feels more immediate and engaging; less lethargic and monotonous; better than *MotoGP*.

Edge rating: Six out of te

Azurik: Rise of Perathia

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Adrenium games** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**

At Microsoft's Gamestock event last year, Ed Fries, vice president of Microsoft Game Studios, was keen to use *Azurik* to support his claims that Xbox was about to usher in a new era. It was, he seemed to be claiming, a *tour de force* of console-style gaming, providing evidence of the technical capabilities of its host machine as well as dispelling the myth that Xbox would merely be a low-cost PC. It is fortunate then, that *Halo* managed to eclipse all expectations, because *Azurik* deserves to be overlooked. More worryingly, it betrays all the hallmarks of a PC developer attempting to emulate a misconceived notion of what console gaming actually consists of.

The game does succeed in getting some things right. Broadly similar to explorative titles with a twist, such as *Soul Reaver* and *Shadowman*, the twist in this case is that over the course of the game your character acquires four elemental powers. Although this sounds quite humdrum, it's the manner in which these elements can be combined to unlock new areas and overcome specific enemies that is particularly neat – as are the impressively vast environments on offer.

However, it's unlikely that too many people will persist long enough to savour the game's subtleties, thanks to a number of significant flaws. For a start, the game's aesthetic is ugly. As you'd expect of a game boasting the frankly corny subtitle 'The Rise of Perathia', the game setting is fairly hackneyed – indeed reading the manual is like having your tea leaves read (The element of Death, for example "means reclamation", or, "in its most dreaded aspect, it represents the void."). More importantly, textural detail is low, and the lighting effects are inconsistent – hardly a good advert for the capabilities of nVidia's custom chipset. The unconfigurable controls are unwieldy at times, and the handling is abhorrent.

Floaty, animation-dictated movement makes the arbitrary and protracted platforming leaps feel quite random. And structurally, the game is a return to the dark ages of 3D platforming, with a proliferation of otiose and confusing 'find switch' puzzles.

It's hardly surprising that certain elements of the PC gaming community should look upon console gaming with such disdain, if, judging by *Azurik*, this is how they perceive it. However, Microsoft can, and should, do much better.

Edge rating: Three out of ten







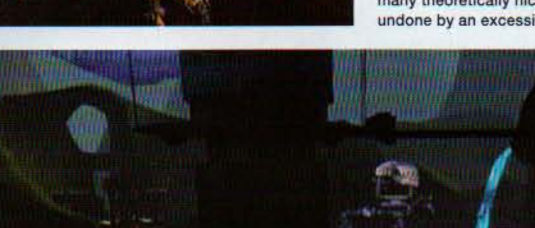


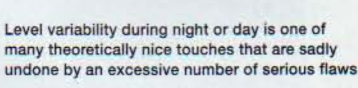




Imprecision camera

Nowhere is *Azurik*'s lack of precise control more apparent than in a camera that reaches almost unparalleled heights of clumsiness. In theory it can be centred by holding down the right trigger, and manipulated via the right analogue stick, but the default view is next to useless, and scenery and objects frequently get in its way. The problem is particularly obvious when Azurik is swimming, as water surfaces simply consist of a flat texture which, depending on where the camera is positioned, totally obscure either what's above or what's below.





Level variability during night or day is one of many theoretically nice touches that are sadly undone by an excessive number of serious flaws



Unsurprisingly, draw distance is good, but textures are generally flat and bland. Combined with substandard platform mechanics, it's hardly the next-generation experience that Microsoft promised

Vampire Night

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **In-house/Wow Entertainment** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

A joint venture between Namco and Sega, *Vampire Night* understandably contains a mixture of *The House of the Dead* and *Time Crisis* flowing through its veins. Spookily, it isn't as good as either, failing to embrace the sense of vulnerability of the former or the momentum of the latter. However, that isn't to say that there's no fun to be had from this. It's rather well presented and offers an interesting twist on the usual lightgun formula by assigning health bars to the stereotyped creatures of the night whose attention you attract (though they can still be halted with just one trigger pull by shooting the weak point).

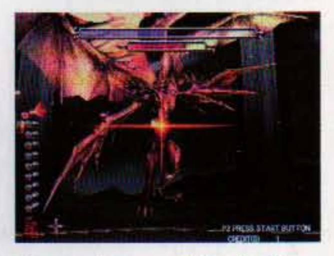
Even by lightgun game criteria, however, it's very short. True, this living room conversion contains play modes not available to arcade players, namely a challenging set of training levels and a Special option which introduces mission elements and a range of collectibles into the main game, yet even with these there just isn't enough here to warrant an outright recommendation. *Vampire Night* just doesn't seem concerned with bringing anything original to the genre. It's seemingly content to suck on capillaries when it should have set its sights on the jugular.

Edge rating: Five out of ten



Angry he may be, but he isn't half as convincing as any of the adversaries you face in Sega's *The House of the Dead*, for instance. Still, at least time has been spent on *Vampire Night*'s aesthetic production

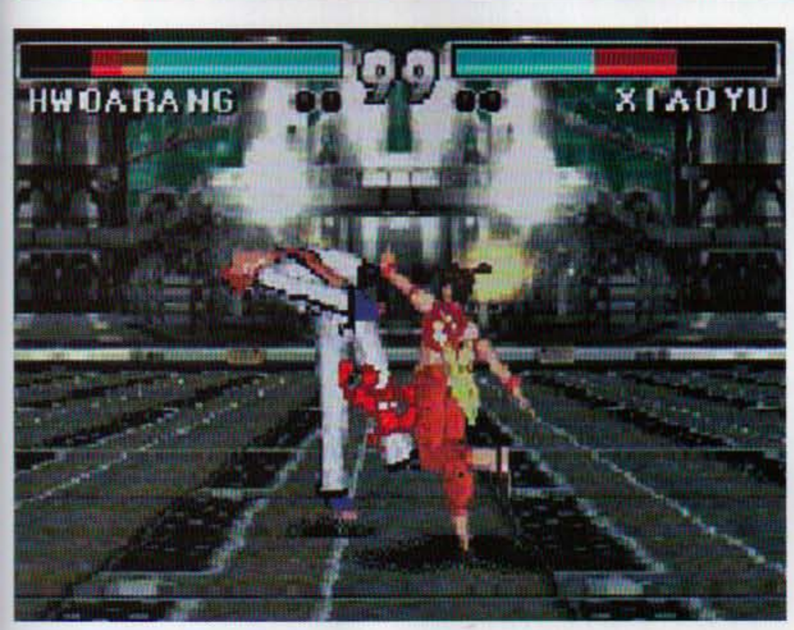




Bosses are too easy, really – rather than impede your progress, they feel like time-consuming segments between levels

Tekken Advance

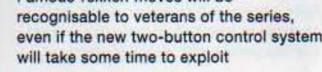
Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£25)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**



The excellent new interpretations of *Tekken*'s previously polygonal fighters bring depth to what is essentially an old skool, on-a-2D-plane experience. The camera also pans in on key actions







Famous *Tekken* moves will be recognisable to veterans of the series, even if the new two-button control system will take some time to exploit

It's no surprise to see one of the richest licences of the 32bit age arrive on Nintendo's increasingly essential machine – the surprise is in the quality and technical imagination of the conversion. *Tekken Advance* takes its impetus from *Tekken 3* and *Tekken Tag Tournament*, introducing the Three Vs Three Tag mode (along with usual Vs, Time Attack, Practice and Arcade options). The game is 2D now, of course, but the combatants can sidestep around each other in an approximation of the 3D arena.

The real achievement, though, is the seamless way in which the *Tekken* gameplay has been condensed into a four-button set-up; kick, punch, tag and throw. The fighting style has been faithfully translated along with recognisable specials and combo moves, and the tag element is well employed, cashing in on the cart access to offer slick character interplay.

Stripped of the flashy movies and lengthy storyline, *Tekken Advance* – like all fighting titles underneath the gloss – is raw, instinctive fun. It's also formulaic stuff – don't expect any new features. As with *SSFII Turbo Revival*, an impressive conversion tinged with nostalgia might not make for a long-lasting treat.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

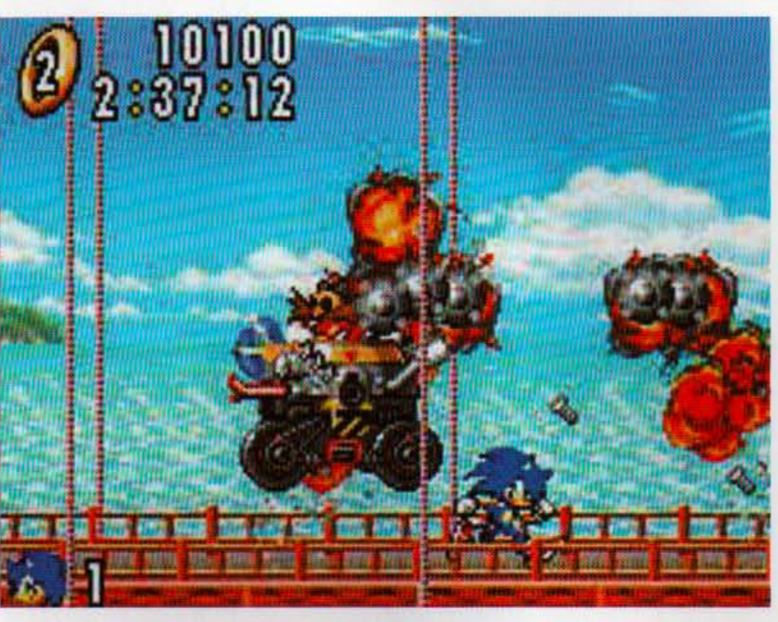
Sonic Advance

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sonic Team** Price: **¥4,800 (£25)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Q1 2002 (UK)**





Gamers bored of hedgehog pinball may want to take control of Tails instead. Not that it changes the dynamic, you're still speeding, spinning, and picking up rings



You'd think by now Robotnik would have noticed that the 'big robot vehicle, simple repeated attacks' approach isn't working, but no, *Sonic Advance* sees him back for more violence spun by the heroic Sonic

Those expecting a port of *Sonic Pocket Adventure* for SNK's defunct handheld can breathe now. This is no *Sonic 2* rehash, but an entirely new outing that offers laudable additions, including a garden for raising Chao (uploadable to GameCube's *Sonic Adventure 2 Battle*) plus a single or dual-cart multiplayer mode.

Predictably, most Hedgehog fans will head straight for the Story mode. Eight graphically-lavish stages feature, including the inevitable Green Hill revamp. The choice of four characters succeeds in adding some variation to the approach, while hidden bonus levels lead to chaos emeralds vital to the game's completion. Indeed, even the play mechanics are relatively untouched, with shields, bumpers and mechanised enemies returning to the fray.

Despite such minimal improvement, the mix is as potent today, as it was over a decade ago. Pinpoint accuracy, hummable BGM and the most hackneyed of boss levels make for gameplay the way it should be. Indeed, with Game Boy Advance fast becoming the weapon-of-choice for revisiting the halcyon days of 2D there's little scope for such software to do anything but succeed all over again.

Edge rating: **Seven** out of te

Kabuki Warriors

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Crave** Developer: **Lightweight Entertainment/Genki** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**104

Kabuki Warriors comes from Lightweight, pushers of historically faithful fighting games. However, this is no subtle replication of the ancient Japanese art. Poorly textured characters waltz to a simplistic system: single buttons are assigned to attack, block, roll and jump, while another makes your character perform a kabuki dance, which leaves them vulnerable but wins coin plaudits from the audience. A meter measures this popularity and when it reaches a certain level, a sixth button will execute a special move – fire, electricity, whatever; weak, pointless, 16bit eye-candy all.

The story-less Story mode, sees your team journeying across 52 near-identical stages, each housing three rival kabuki players. Entering a stage means suffering a best-of-three tournament, and, should you emerge victorious – which you will, since it requires some effort to lose – you win the opportunity to swap one of your fighters with one of theirs. Stages finance travel, and more dancing means more money means more level skips. Skipping levels is a good thing, as the actors take their final bows all the quicker, and you never, *ever* need to revisit the performance. This isn't kabuki. It's *Yie Ar Kung Fu* with blusher.

Edge rating: **One** out of **ten**





The first characters you receive don't have any special moves or, oddly, any textures to speak of. It looks like it plays, like the game's still in development

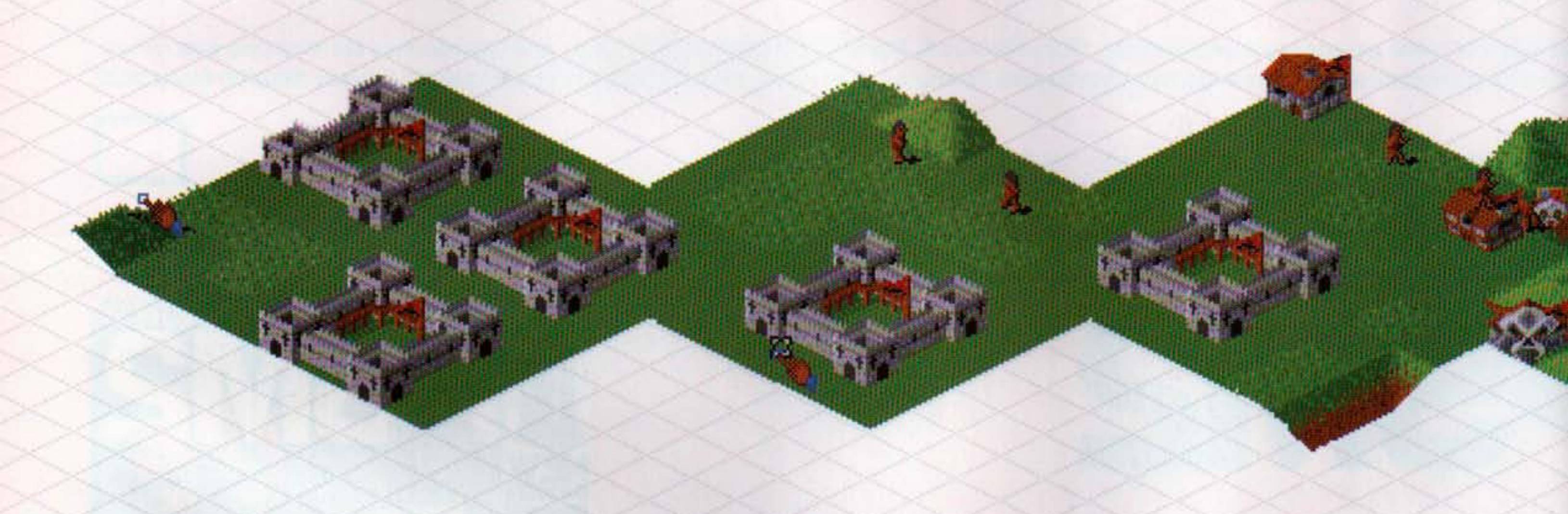


Special moves are one-joke irrelevances, doing little to deepen the dynamic. Edge beat the game using just one move, over and over again. That's not indicative of any skill, just programming idiocy

The making of...

Populous

With precious little game development experience, tiny startup Bullfrog created not just a memorable game but, in essence, an entire genre. Populous discarded the established blueprint of 'direct control' between player and on-screen charges, marking a true generational leap for game design

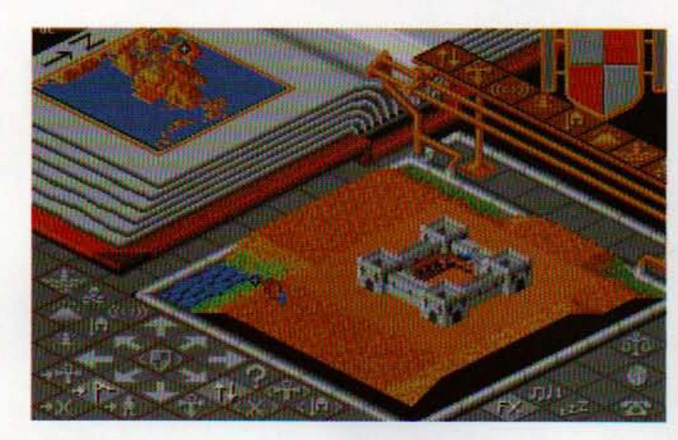


Format:	**Amiga**
Publisher:	**Electronic Arts**
Developer:	**Bullfrog**
Origin:	**UK**
Original release date:	**March 1989**



We insisted that we would only fly over if we could go first class – it seemed worth a try – but we were amazed when they agreed," recalls **Les Edgar**, co-founder of Bullfrog. "It seemed so opulent. I can remember Peter and I saying on the flight that we'd never in our lives be able to travel like that again. When we arrived in Japan, there were TV cameras at the airport – and, with no forewarning whatsoever, they were waiting for us. We just couldn't believe it."

Rewind through weeks, months, seasons, and the story of *Populous* begins with a simple misunderstanding. Commodore, fostering industry support for its fledgling Amiga during the mid-1980s, sought to contact Torus: a firm specialising in network solutions. An auspicious error led to an unexpected call for *Taurus*: a minor startup, barely founded, with a plan for a database



One occasionally overlooked facet of Bullfrog's momentous first game is its superb multiplayer support. That two players could link Amigas for one-on-one battles was a technical feat; the additional option for cross-platform combat – between ST and Amiga – was truly revolutionary

program. Judicious use of language by **Peter Molyneux** during a subsequent visit to Commodore led to the not inconsiderable bonus of free Amiga hardware for his tiny company.

More fortuity was to follow. Offered the opportunity to write an Amiga port of *Druid 2* for Telecomsoft, Peter bluffed his way into a princely £8,000 contract and hired **Glenn Corpes**, initially to fulfil an art role. "I didn't think I would be able to cut it as an artist for much longer, because of the higher standards required with new hardware," Corpes candidly admits – but he could also perform coding duties. This handy, incidental ability became a catalyst when, apropos of something or other – and, he says, inspired in part by *Spindizzy*'s screens of 8 x 8 isometric cells – Corpes created a 3D landscape with variable terrain levels. Les Edgar and Peter found this immediately intriguing. With no end result in mind, no blueprint, but with palpable enthusiasm, they began to experiment.

"Over a week, we got a landscape you could move around," says Molyneux, "but we didn't really know what to do with it. I said, 'Let's put some little people on it.' Me being me, I think I actually said something like, 'Let's have a *thousand* little people run around on it.'"

Of course, key to *Populous* is the ability to alter the level of its terrain, and what was originally a novel trick soon became an integral gameplay element – but only after one issue was addressed.

"All you could do at first was raise the landscape up and down," remembers Corpes. "This was going to be controlle[d] with a joystick, but it was Peter who sai[d] we should use the mouse. It was a nast[y] bit of coding to coordinate landscape an[d] mouse pointer."

"We were very primitive at that poin[t]," explains Molyneux. "It seemed a dauntin[g] task, although it seems laughably simple now. It was all a bit soulless, though. Th[e] next step was realising that it was pointless just having the people milling around, so why not let them have little houses? Little people would look for blank area of land, then build a house. The more houses, the more people, and the game evolved through that."

"We didn't talk about gods for a second – it really didn't occur to us. We said: let's have a red team, and a blue team, and they're both trying to expand to fill the most territory. The next thing w[e] did was the most amazing revelation. W[e] linked up machines with serial cable, which led to early multiplayer games. Multiplayer *Populous* came way before the singleplayer game. It was far more strategic and quicker than we thought it could be, flattening the landscape for your team. We even coined special term[s] for what we would do, like 'sprogging' and 'nippling'. There was still something lacking, though. The games we played took hours and hours – the only way to win was to stop the other person's people settling down."

"We got the multiplayer mode working from pretty much day one, and [it] was really good fun," agrees Corpes, wh[o] produced the distinctive 'book' border artwork within days of beginning work, "but games did last too long. We used t[o] work on it until six, play it till ten, then go to the pub and talk about it for an hour."

With Molyneux and Corpes looking to add layers to their simple, engaging brief, Les Edgar attempted, for a worryin[g] time in vain, to find a publisher. "We couldn't sell it to anyone," Edgar recalls with a laugh. "I even rang up Lego, and tried to explain the idea to them. They didn't like the Good versus Evil idea for some strange reason, so they weren't interested – which is funny, when you consider all the Lego sets with laser gun[s], cowboys and Indians, and so forth. We tried everybody. While [the team] were in the office, I went off with disks to, I suppose, over a dozen publishers – eve[n] the B-, C-, D- and E-list companies. We didn't go to EA even though we knew





Its successor added a popular full-screen option, but few criticised *Populous'* small play area. It's perhaps difficult to appreciate, with hindsight, just how truly revolutionary Corpes and Molyneux's engine seemed in 1989, although its icons took time to memorise



them through *Fusion* [an early, almost entirely forgotten Bullfrog shoot 'em up] because we honestly thought they wouldn't be interested. Eventually, we put it past Joss Ellis at EA and – to our amazement – he gave us the green light."

Glenn Corpes thinks that Ellis, having worked as producer on Geoff Crammond's *The Sentinel* earlier in his career, may have suggested *Populous'* (very similar) level progression system. He also remembers Molyneux suffering disastrous hard drive failure; with no back-up of his source code, Molyneux was forced to work tirelessly for three weeks to rewrite it. Without a discernible trace of *schadenfreude*, Corpes remarks that it was probably a blessing in disguise: the code was much better the second time around.

What would become known by many as 'God powers' were introduced as the missing gameplay device; flesh to the muscle and sinew of encouraging your miniature charges to be fruitful and multiply. "The first effect we put in was the volcano," reveals Molyneux. "We had this idea that a little power bar could grow when your people were inside their houses. That led to the introduction of earthquakes and swamps… but there was still one big problem. How could you finish a game more quickly? The last thing we added, and the solution, was the knight – the ability to combine the little people into one big soldier to go and fight."

Despite their obvious passion for their opus, Molyneux vividly remembers fearing the worst when the time came to show *Populous* to the outside world. "I can remember worrying, 'People are going to think this is completely weird.' We'd already seen that loads of publishers didn't get it and, as we had a comparatively bad deal with EA, we weren't really expecting any royalties. Without showing someone, or better still, letting them play *Populous*, we didn't really know how best to explain it. At no point during development did we talk about you being a god, or it being a 'god game' – it just didn't occur to us. The person who suggested that was a journalist called **Bob Wade**. He was the first games journalist to come and see it."

Bob Wade, then of multiformat games magazine ACE, is now a company director. "It would be nice to think it was me, but I'm pretty sure it was the ACE team as a whole that came up with 'god game.' I do remember the trip to see it, though. They were obviously not media savvy, and weren't used to having that sort of attention. Only afterwards did I realise how unprepared they were for it all. They were normal people, with a genuine passion for what they were doing. It was as much them asking what I thought of it as it was me asking them about how it worked. I remember Peter asking me what I thought of it while in the pub later that day and I didn't have any qualms about saying that it was bloody special, absolutely blinding, and it was going to be huge. I really wanted to go back and play it again."

"All I wanted to say was, 'What do you think?'" laughs Molyneux. "So we took him down the pub, drank God knows how many pints, plucked up the courage, and then asked him. And he really, genuinely, loved it. So I made the decision not to take him back to play it again, just in case he changed his mind."

Critical approbation vindicated the team's desire to innovate – and *Populous* truly met with universal acclaim – but Bullfrog was impoverished. At the time, the codeshop was operating out of a room in an attic ("Our offices were shite, they were absolutely awful," shudders Molyneux) above a pensioner who would later attack senior Fujitsu staff with a mop when they attempted to pay a visit. "We were totally broke," Molyneux confides.

"Our royalty cheques were due to be paid one quarter in arrears, and we didn't expect to get any," Les Edgar recalls. "We really were very detached from the quantities sold – we had no idea how big it was. Our first cheque was for £13,000. We agreed to pay off bills, and then think about what to do next. The next cheque was for a quarter of a million. I thought it was a mistake at the time. I actually called EA to tell them. And then Imagineer made an absurdly huge offer for rights to develop it as one of the launch titles for the SNES in Japan."

Ah, yes. Japan. At the airport, Molyneux and Edgar were thoroughly nonplussed by their reception, and the events that followed. "It was massive over there," Molyneux says, with understatement. Western computer games just didn't, and still don't, evoke great fervour in Japan. "They had organised this big competition, with me playing against their national champion. They even played our respective anthems before we began. I hadn't played it in two months. I knew the cheats, though. I would have used them if I hadn't had all those bloody cameras watching my every move. [Laughs] He absolutely thrashed me."

As a footnote, it's worth mentioning that Glenn Corpes claims that Molyneux nefariously tweaked aspects of the *Populous* code in order to beat him during multiplayer battles. We don't doubt it for a second, Glenn.



Those who bought the add-on pack for *Populous* have reason to feel *mildly* cheated: in terms of programming Peter Molyneux merely (and cheekily) reversed the order of the random number 'seeds' used to generate landscapes

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 43, March 1997

"Entertainment is not a necessity. When it is not interesting we can leave it and ignore it. What happened to Atari can happen any time in Japan." So said Nintendo's Hiroshi Yamauchi, whose tough guy image can't have been hurt by the man-of-steel fifth colour applied to his face across **E**43's cover. "We have elected to release fewer titles, and only splendid games will be released for the N64," was the president's policy, although the 64 incarnation of that other man of steel, Superman, would later question Yamauchi-san's definition of splendid. Maybe something was lost in the translation.

The Prescreen section led with Core's disappointing *Ninja* ("Can lightning strike twice?" asked **Edge** excitedly), while a look at Looking Glass' *Thief*, then still known by its subtitle 'The Dark Project', sneaked in at the rear. And, while Perceptions was hyping its M2 RPG *Power Crystal*, a convenient revelation appeared elsewhere. The feature on Great Videogame Myths went deep into gaming's history and turned up the truth behind the M2 technology demo at '95's E3. "It was all just hot air. Hype," revealed a source close to 3DO. **Edge**'s response? Plus ça change...

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"We were proud to be approached to work on the M2. It's great to be the first with such stunning hardware." Andrew Whittaker, Perceptions, makes **Edge** wonder if the comedic M2 quote supply will ever dry up.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"*Ecstatica 2* is a game with more balls than most." **Edge** shoehorns a spherical gag into the review of Pysgnosis' ellipsoid survival horror sequel.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

MDK (PC; 9/10), *Ecstatica 2* (PC; 7/10), *Dark Saviour* (Saturn; 7/10), *Die Hard Arcade* (Saturn; 6/10), *Raystorm* (PS; 7/10), *Monster Trucks* (PS; 6/10), *Micro Machines v3* (PS; 8/10), *Scorcher* (PC, Saturn; 7/10), *NBA Hangtime* (N64; 5/10), *The City of Lost Children* (PS; 4/10)




1



2



3

4



5



6

1. The Power of the M2: fake render... 2. ... And actual screenshot, from *Power Crystal* 3. "Can I have your autograph, Mr Yamauchi?" "At the end of this contract legally binding my company to ignore Europe for the next ten years? Sure!" 4. Big In Japan that month: bikini catgirls 5. Konami's *Castlevania X*, going for the Christian demographic 6. Nolan Bushnell, Ponged

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Aleks Krotoski, presenter of Channel 4's 'Thumb Bandits', gets on her bike




Aleks Krotoski gets a warm glow just thinking about the obstacle course in *Paperboy*

It was back in the late '80s, when I was living a stone's throw from Disneyland, that my fascination for *Paperboy* began. It was the machine situated directly at the exit of Space Mountain, and I associate hours of quarter-flogging with the post-coital adrenaline rush of being hurtled at a zillion miles an hour through pitch black.

But what really dragged me in was the handlebar peripheral, the very first ridiculous controller! With it, you could steer your delivery boy through a week of sunrise toil and tribulation, down a street of volatile residents (and their pets) and chuck the Daily Sun into mailboxes, onto doorsteps, and most likely, through windows. The more people you pissed off, the fewer subscriptions you had the next day, but you got extra points for trashing non-subscribers' property. At the end was an obstacle course with targets, high platforms and a round of applause at the finish. A generation of British gamers grew up thinking there was an assault course at the end of every American paperboy's route. Let me assure you there wasn't. But it was tricky. I was lucky if I got to Wednesday. Home it came, onto my Atari, but without the cool peripheral, the game went kinda flat. But thanks for the memories, *Paperboy*. You'll always be remembered as my first job.

FAQ

Jeremy Longley

director, project leader, Lost Toys

Having cut his development teeth at Bullfrog on titles such as *Theme Hospital*, Jeremy Longley joined the exodus when he set up Lost Toys in Guildford with Glenn Corpes.

What was the first videogame you played?
Asteroids, I think. Although it might have been *Space Invaders* or *Breakout*.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
An Amstrad CPC464 – one of the first, with the proper keyboards, before they flattened them. Although I had a Game & Watch, and a really cool CGL *Frogger* machine before that.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
I wrote an extremely dodgy *Donkey Kong* game on the Spectrum in about 1983.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
Bullfrog – I was dumped straight into writing complex collision code for *Creation* (sadly never released), and followed that with music for *Theme Hospital*.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Mario 64 – superb in so many ways, and as a 3D platformer nothing's even come close since. *Kick Off 2* comes a close second.

What was the last game you played and what did you think of it?
Project Eden – pretty cool. You can see that a lot of time and effort has gone into creating the puzzles, and there's some really cool texture work. Shame about the ending, though.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
Depends – probably 10–15. Less now that I've (finally) stopped playing *Quake* regularly. I make an effort to try to finish one game every couple of months.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
BeatMania.

What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
Anything written by Iain M Banks ('Use of Weapons'), or Neal Stephenson ('The Diamond Age'). As for albums, Liquid Tension Experiment II (obscure) or Queensryche – 'Operation Mindcrime' (less so). Recent favourite films are 'Fight Club' and 'Memento'.

Which Website do you most regularly visit?
Google.

What game would you most like to have worked on?
Deus Ex. Incredibly complicated, but they managed to make it all stick (and release it).

Of all the games you've been involved in in the past, what's your favourite and why?
MoHo – okay, so it was too hard to get into, but when you did it was one of the most infuriatingly addictive games I've ever played, even if **Edge** disagrees.

What stage is your current project at?
We're about a year into a really cool console shoot 'em up. We'll be announcing all the details in the New Year. [See p38.]

What aspect of it do you think will impress players the most?
That we've created an incredibly detailed and complex setting for the game, and yet kept the gameplay intuitive, accessible and immediate.

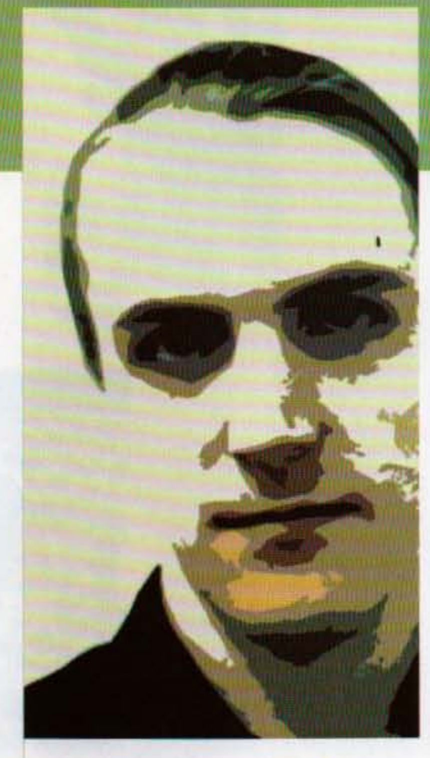
What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
I know it's many years away, but when game developers can assume that everyone has a broadband connection, gaming will change into a "what shall I play tonight?" attitude that TV has right now.

"The games industry has matured massively over the last ten years, but it still looks like a pimply teenager to the outside world"

What disappoints you about the videogame industry?
That fewer and fewer people outside of Japan are prepared to take a risk on being creative.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
The same as I always have – the fact that you start with nothing, and end up with something wonderful in a box on a shelf that people can buy and be entertained by.

Whose work do you most admire?
Miyamoto has the highest 'game' to 'great game' ratio I can think of; I'll always keep an eye out for anything he's involved with. Otherwise, the Japanese in general – that they consistently turn out original, creative, mad ideas, and keep their market interested in that type of game. Can you imagine pitching *Super Monkey Ball* or *Rez* to an American publisher?



What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
Well the latest batch are all out now. I'd say the GameCube will have the highest average quality of games, simply because of the profile of the developers working on it; but I'm hoping that the competition will drive some life into the industry.

Do you have any thoughts on mobile phone gaming?
I'm still waiting for something that really qualifies as a game.

Videogames: Art or Entertainment? (Discuss)
Entertainment. A game can be artless entertainment, but it can't be entertainment-free art. Of course, it's usually better if it's both! (Does anyone remember the 'art' mode in *I-Robot* if you pressed the wrong button?)

What pleases/disappoints you about the way videogames are discussed in both the specialist and mainstream press?
It would be nice if it *was* discussed in the press, other than as a gimmick that they expect people to grow out of. The games industry has matured internally (by force rather than design) massively over the last ten years, but still looks like a pimply teenager to the outside world.

inbox

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edge@futurenet.co.uk

So Edge once again pins its colours very firmly to the mast [Prescreen Intro/**Edge** 105]. It seems Miyamoto-san can really do no wrong in your eyes. 'Cartoon Link' might well be to your liking, **Edge**, but did you stop to wonder why over 9000 equally passionate individuals have taken the time and effort to register their dislike for Miyamoto-san's new 'vision' for Link? They can't all be bonkers/missing the point/ill-informed/party-poopers (delete as appropriate).

I definitely do not like 'Cartoon Link' and, frankly, I expected better from Nintendo with regard to one of their flagship franchises – especially when it comes to debuting it on GameCube. True, Link was 'cute' on N64, but at least he existed as a fully three-dimensional character in a beautiful and believable game-world. If it were up to me (and a whole lot of others) I'd take Miyamoto-san to one side for a 'quiet word' about his new 'vision' for Link. Here is a real opportunity to let Link loose in a glorious realisation of the *Zelda* game-world – with all that horsepower sitting under GameCube's bonnet; a chance to deliver a killer punch to those other 128bit contenders and create a truly unforgettable (and unimaginably profitable) title into the bargain. Instead, we have the prospect of a cel-shaded two-dimensional sprite wandering about a distinctly underwhelming environment.

Maybe I'm going to have to stick with *Dark Cloud*, *Jak and Daxter*, et al. I don't want to, you understand, but I – along with so many others – just feel very let down by Nintendo's decision to 're-invent' Link for a new generation. We were looking forward – so much – to seeing Link triumphant on 128bit technology.

It is a fact that the new-look Link has very definitely *not* gone down well with a very large proportion of Zelda fans and this, in itself, does not bode well for the game's prospects come release. Of course, Nintendo can ignore the pleadings of its core consumer-base if it wants to, but even they might like to note a recent poll in EGM (US edition), which reported a whopping 48% of potential GameCube buyers would choose to make *Rogue Leader* their first purchase for the console, with *Luigi's Mansion* trailing with a poor 28%. Not like the days of *Mario 64*, is it?

A little less pontificating, **Edge**, a touch more subjectivity, please – we're really not all idiots – and make mine a *Rogue Leader*, with all the trimmings.
Philip Ford

Surely one of the most attractive aspects of videogaming is the creative freedom when constructing a gaming environment – to have the choice (and courage) of exploring new artistic avenues rather than remain tied down to realism? **Edge** would argue the new *Zelda* already promises the very thing you crave – it uses the GC's power to create a glorious realisation of a game world and, potentially, a "truly unforgettable title".

Console games have never really interested me. I prefer simulations, and these are what the PC does best. Bearing this in mind, I was fascinated by the letter in issue 103 regarding the suggestion that **Edge** should give up reviewing PC games, simply because the writer didn't agree with your review of *Max Payne*. Personally, I find it refreshing to see an honest review of a game that is far too shallow to be called a simulation, and is certainly not a good example of a typical PC game. The ironic part of this is that I would actually class *Max Payne* as more of a console game than anything else, mainly because of its simplistic nature. I have played the demo, and this was enough to convince me that anyone interested in simulations would find nothing of interest here.

As far as PC game reviews are concerned, I believe that the credibility of **Edge** is second to none. The likes of *Max Payne* suffer because they are flawed, but true classics like *Deus Ex* are revealed as the real gems of the PC gaming world.
Chris Low

The article 'Middleware: sinner or saviour?' in **E**105 raises some interesting points, but seems slightly biased in favour of the growth of middleware. In the interests of redressing this balance, here are a few thoughts on this subject.

One major downside is that middleware kills skills. Some of the most valued skills for games programmers are best learned by working on engine code. An intimate knowledge of the best ways to push graphics hardware is usually gained by getting down to the metal. 3D maths skills are most readily honed by coding up a physics engine. The proliferation of middleware could see the next generation of games programmers missing such important skills, and hence remove much of the innovation that games programmers are valued for.

Munch's Oddysee is cited as a success story for middleware. A few facts are missing from this tale. Oddworld Inhabitants have some of the industries most respected programmers helping to make this game a success – it probably wouldn't be so hot if the team were purely 'art driven'. The ability of Oddworld's artists is also a major contributing factor towards the quality of the game. The way an engine looks is limited by how well the artists utilise it.

I've seen first hand (although not at Creature Labs) what can happen to a game when middleware rendering and physics engines are used by programmers who do not have engine coding experience. Middleware certainly has its place, but it's still a long way from obviating the need for in-house technology.
Oscar Cooper, Creature Labs

I have been a games player since around 1980. I currently own a PSone, GBA and a super dooper PC. I'm thinking of buying one of the big three consoles, (well two – I refuse to contribute to Gates Inc, so the Xbox is out), but I am confused and bemused by many issues. Firstly, I like PC games. I never used to really, but I have been converted. I think the PC platform creates games that simply could not have been written for a console. But times are changing fast, and we are now seeing a far more sophisticated type of gaming experience on the consoles – more PC-lik

"If it were up to me (and a whole lot of others) I'd take Miyamoto-san to one side for a 'quiet word' about his new 'vision' for Link"



Philip Ford appears happy to dismiss a game simply based on its aesthetic treatment, even when no substantial details of play mechanics are known

if you will. This is all very good, but what I would like to know is, is there a future for PC gaming, especially now that the 'gaming PC without Windows', aka Xbox, has arrived on the scene? Is Microsoft putting its sizeable might behind removing the PC from the gaming equation altogether by creating the Xbox?

For me, it would be a great shame if the PC died as a viable gaming platform, not because I'm a geek who is slavishly devoted to a single platform, but because different gaming platforms offer different types of games and gaming experience. Handhelds, by the very nature of their dimensions and hardware, require game designers to design games that exploit the platform best and make the most of its limitations, hence the proliferation of 2D platformers and puzzle games. But there are still good, innovative games to be found on hadlhelds despite the relative lack of graphical sophistication on offer.

The PC, with graphics every bit as exciting as a console, is a platform which is unique in the gaming world – I doubt if truly great games like *Half-Life*, *Doom*, *Shogun*, *Civilisation*, *Operation Flashpoint* or *Hidden and Dangerous*, would have existed at all if it wasn't for the PC platform (you can also, obviously, use this argument as well for consoles). I think gaming diversity will die out if different platforms die. At the moment, we are standing at a gaming crossroads – consoles are adopting the best bits of PC gaming, and making it more user friendly and less messy (no drivers, patches, compatibility issues, etc) for first-time players. The Xbox looks to me like the first generation of PC/console hybrids. My question is, as a devout games player regardless of platform, where does this leave the PC?

Mark Doyle

There PC remains home to genres that consoles can't touch, though perhaps not as many as there once were. As long as there's a market for such titles, and publishers continue to make a profit, don't expect PC gaming to disappear overnight.

I expect Matthew Pringle thinks those same Game Boy-buying 12-year-olds buy 'FCUK' tops because they think French Connection make high quality, reasonably priced clothes? After 18 years in videogames my reaction to the Xbox was the same as your cover – well done. The cover looked stylish and was way less offensive than some of the shite on the shelves.

Iain

I have recently had to think about my responsibilities as an adult after my friend's eight-year-old son came to visit and wanted to play *Grand Theft Auto III*. He stated the old refrain that, "All of my mates have got it," but then detailed a knowledge of the game that could have only have come from playing it for some time. I was caught in a dilemma as it seemed pointless to deny him game time but I felt that he was not mature enough to understand some of the deeper issues of morality/immorality that arise from playing *GTAIII*.

This got me into thinking about the possibility of DMA Design developing a child-friendly version of the game. It would feature exactly the same fictitious city, graphics engine and game play, etc, but with a slightly different pretext and mission objectives. For instance, the protagonist could be a cop or a detective and missions such as murdering the Mafia boss could be changed to disabling his Limo by shooting the tyres, thereby resulting in his capture. Most of the driving-based missions could remain intact and non-lethal weaponry such as stun guns and tranquilliser darts could replace some of the guns, with a pistol only becoming available in later missions where self defence may be crucial. It could be made impossible for pedestrians to be killed or run over by employing methods such as are included in the *Driver* series and blood and gore could be removed without compromising the gameplay as games such as *TimeSplitters* and *GoldenEye* have shown.Its novelty factor in *GTAIII* soon becomes secondary to the gameplay anyhow.

These modifications and tweaks to the game should not hold up release deadlines as the development would run in tandem with the adult version and should prove to be profitable as the basic game would be universally available. The publisher would also be releasing two games simultaneously but using only one promotion and marketing budget thereby further cutting costs. There may also be a crossover potential with adult gamers buying the child version after they have completed their game and also the possibility of an i-Link mode of 'cops and robbers'.

I believe that parallel development of adult/child orientated games may be a way forward out of what can be a moral minefield and would possible please everyone from producers to consumers. Incidentally, I introduced my friend's son to the joys of *ISS* and *GTAIII* was quickly forgotten.

Jay Smith (though not the same Jay Smith who was recently published)

Ed Bartlett's comments in last month's Inbox were a little strange. Yes, videogames are still in their infancy: this is why we are a lot more forgiving of bad ones. (Less so than 15 years ago as Eddie Daly pointed out on the same page with his superb analysis of the Spectrum.) As a gamer, I don't expect to find perfect games around every corner, and neither does **Edge**, as we can see from your review scores. In fact, I expect every game I buy to be flawed, and I'm usually right. Every now and again, I'm proved wrong and it's fantastic: this is what I hope to see more of as the market matures.

But to use the infancy of the medium as a defence of bad writing in games is weak. Writing for games is like writing for any other medium. The only reason cliché-heavy, badly written stories are so pervasive in games is that game designers think like game designers, and treat the storyline, to quote Ed, as something "which merely serves to stitch the gameplay sequences together".

Look at *Deus Ex* for example. It had plot, exposition, back-story, subplot and narrative, but it also had interaction and gameplay in spades. It

"The only reason cliché-heavy, badly written stories are so pervasive is that designers treat the storyline as something 'which merely serves to stitch the gameplay together'"



A different Jay Smith wonders whether publishers should consider simultaneous development of child-friendly versions of their more violent titles

also had a fully paid-up professional writer on the staff, who knew his craft and was adaptive enough to cooperate effectively with the rest of the team.

It was so successful because the designers didn't treat the storyline and interactivity as a tradeoff, as Ed seems to imply when he says, "If you want a good story read a book." Maybe I'll take that into account when I next think about buying a Bitmap Brothers game.
Chris

I think a point was missed in Rob Cole's letter concerning the secondhand games market (**E**106). When I take a game back to EB or wherever, it's not only because I'm a bit sick of it, but also to part-finance the purchase of a new title – which is good for the games industry I would imagine.
Greg Wheeler

Having read the letters page (**E**106) I feel the need to address some of the issues raised. The comment about the front cover of **E**105 is, at best, misguided. I felt that it highlighted a very important advance in videogaming, namely the release of the Xbox.

Also, I was not as lucky as Jay Smith as I was too ill to travel to Manchester. Sega themselves have stated the improvements over the Dreamcast version of *Jet Set Radio*. From the screenshots and movies I've seen this is a big (for a sequel) improvement on the original. *Halo* is recognised by all magazines, yourselves included, as an amazing game and to compare it to anything on the PS2 is strange indeed. I've already pre-ordered my Xbox and spend most of my time worrying what games to get (I can only afford two). *Halo* is one, with *Project Gotham*, or *DOA3* or one of the others because they all look worthy of a purchase. When I purchased a PS2 for my son I had a similar problem but, the other way round. It was hard to find two good games. I know about *GT3*, *MSG2* and *Devil May Cry*, but these weren't launch titles.

As for the controller, big and ugly though they are, for someone like me who has problems with all my joints it could be the perfect answer. I find the PS2 pad very painful after half an hour or so. I don't want to get into the my console is better than yours trap, because I'm 38 and had that from the days of the Mega Drive/SNES. It's just the Xbox can do things that the PS2 can't.

Finally in my opinion the Xbox is the greatest improvement in console technology (due to the built in hard drive) there has ever been. In years to come people will thank Microsoft for making it possible to advance game design and enjoyment.
Dave Ponsford

Firstly I'd like to say that I have never in my 21 years of life ever written a letter to a magazine but your constant critism of Nintendo's European policy has forced me to write and defend Nintendo.

I'm not an employee of Nintendo, but I feel that after three and a half years of great PAL N64 conversions they deserved someone to speak up for them. Its true a lot of early AAA N64 games had big borders (and 100% of SNES games), but from *Lylat Wars* onwards they made sure that they optimised all their games even niche games like *Tetrisphere* were full screen and full speed.

Yes Nintendo do make bad decisions such as no *Sin & Punishment* or *Animal Forest*, but Nintendo are a business not a charity for skint hardcore gamers who can't afford an import machine or read Japanese. Would you spend thousands of dollars to translate *Animal Forest* into 15 languages, only to see it sell 100 copies?

I haven't bought a PAL PSone or PS2 game since 1996 but recently I was horrified to play a PAL copy of *Devil May Cry*. I was shocked that this was still going on. I've been buying PAL dreamcast and N64 games for years and assumed that this sort of treatment of AAA games had stopped. what I would like to know is why do you ignore Sony's mistreatment of the PAL market while accusing Nintendo of an act because of what it did between 1992–1997.

In **E**106 you even put Nintendo in third place behind Xbox for this same reason. You seem to be using opinion instead of fact. Maybe you should start reviewing PAL versions of games instead of the imports. Maybe this'll refresh your memory on who really mistreats Europe. I'm not saying Nintendo is whiter than white because they still have issues to solve, as I'm still waiting for *Advance Wars* (I'm not prepared to pay $50 to CEX) but neither are Sony or even Microsoft as it's too early to tell what sort of attitude Microsoft has towards Europe but lets hope it's more like Sega's (or Nintendo's) rather than Sony's.
Kamran Tehzeeb

Opinion instead of fact? Fact: when it comes to Europe, Nintendo is consistently the most uncommunicative company (only now, 18 months after Japan and the US got theirs, are details of the GC's EU launch being announced). Fact: PAL versions of Nintendo consoles and games take generally take far longer to emerge than those of its competitors (*Excitebike 64* arrived over a year later than its NTSC cousin – and with borders).

In Europe, Nintendo behaves like a petulant child – happy to promote its range when things are going well, but likely to stop playing as soon as conditions change (compare the marketing push of the Game Boy series to that of the N64, for instance). Granted, Microsoft has much to prove but it would take little effort to ensure its approach to this continent is at least on a par with that of Nintendo's.

The majority of SCEE published games now appear to offer anamorphic and/or 60Hz options – let's hope other publishers follows suit.

I was wondering if somebody could tell me why more games don't have subtitles for the cut-scenes (for example *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, for one, is sadly lacking)? There's a lot of deaf gamers out there who miss out cause they can't tell what's going on in the cut-scenes. Even an option to turn them on or off would be welcome.
Stephen McCarthy

"The Xbox is the greatest ever improvement in console technology. In years to come people will thank Microsoft for making it possible to advance game design and enjoyment"







Stephen McCarthy reminds developers that the simple inclusion of subtitles (as in *MGS2*, far left, but not *RtCW*, left) is a crucial one for deaf gamers

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

Topic: **7.30 am phone call.**
Poster: **irishjackal**
I was awoken this morning by my mobile ringing: it was my sister. I had given her *Shenmue* for Christmas. This was the conversation:
Me: "Maureen?"
Moe: "John do you have *Shenmue 2?*"
Me: "Wha…?"
Moe: "I've just finished *Shenmue* do you have the second one?"
Me: "No, get it in town for 30 quid."
Moe: "Ah right okay, I'll let you get back to bed."
Initially pissed at this wake up call, I now think it's nice to see such enthusiasm in a 32-year old mother of three – no wonder her house is messy.

Poster: **Simon_B**
My sister is in her mid/late 30s. Her eight-year old son has been harping for six months about wanting "a PS2 like uncle Simon". She really didn't want to get him one on grounds of principle; "He'll just sit in front of the screen all day", "The games are too violent", "We've already got a PC", etc. She finally relented, however, and at Christmas my nephew got a PS2 plus *GT3*.
I phoned her a couple of days after to find that she couldn't stop playing the *Jak and Daxter* demo, so she went out and bought the game for herself. I took over *Grand Theft Auto III* for her to try (yes, after the children had gone to bed!). It was a title that she really didn't like the sound of when I bought it, but you should've seen her play it – after running over a shed load of pedestrians, she exited the stolen van and took an Uzi to a gang of Yardies. Then she started to smack an old lady around with a baseball bat. And she was laughing like a drain, throughout!

Topic: **Camera**
Poster: **ska_mad**
Why is it that many game developers are willing to deliver games with dire camera angles? Even Rare does it. The only games in which I felt the camera was perfect were *Ocarina of Time* and *Majora's Mask*. So why can't this erratic camera in many thirdperson games be fixed? Surely someone other than Nintendo can create a camera that works?

Poster: **JB**
One of the interesting things in thirdperson games is how the level design works with the camera. In *Mario 64* for example the only problems with the camera came in the indoor sections where the walls obstructed the camera. In *Zelda* the rooms are generally large enough to accommodate the camera wherever you go. Combat takes place in large spaces, where the camera is less likely to get stuck. Also, because of the Z-targeting, you can't lose sight of the enemy and you can keep track of them even when the camera is forced to get very close to Link. *Metal Gear Solid* works because it takes the camera outside of the room, by making the ceiling transparent, meaning that the walls are not an obstacle.
Many game cameras fail because the levels are set in confined spaces and the camera simply can't find a place to go. *Rocket: Robot on Wheels* and *Tomb Raider* are examples of this, where the camera flips about all over the place because the action takes place in too small a space to give it a chance. In both games, when you're in an open space there's no problem.

Topic: **Averageware**
Poster: **welsh**
Averageware. Definition: Software developed with the intention of release on all current formats (Xbox/PS2/Gamecube), despite only the most popular format (the PS2, in this instance) receiving any significant attention.

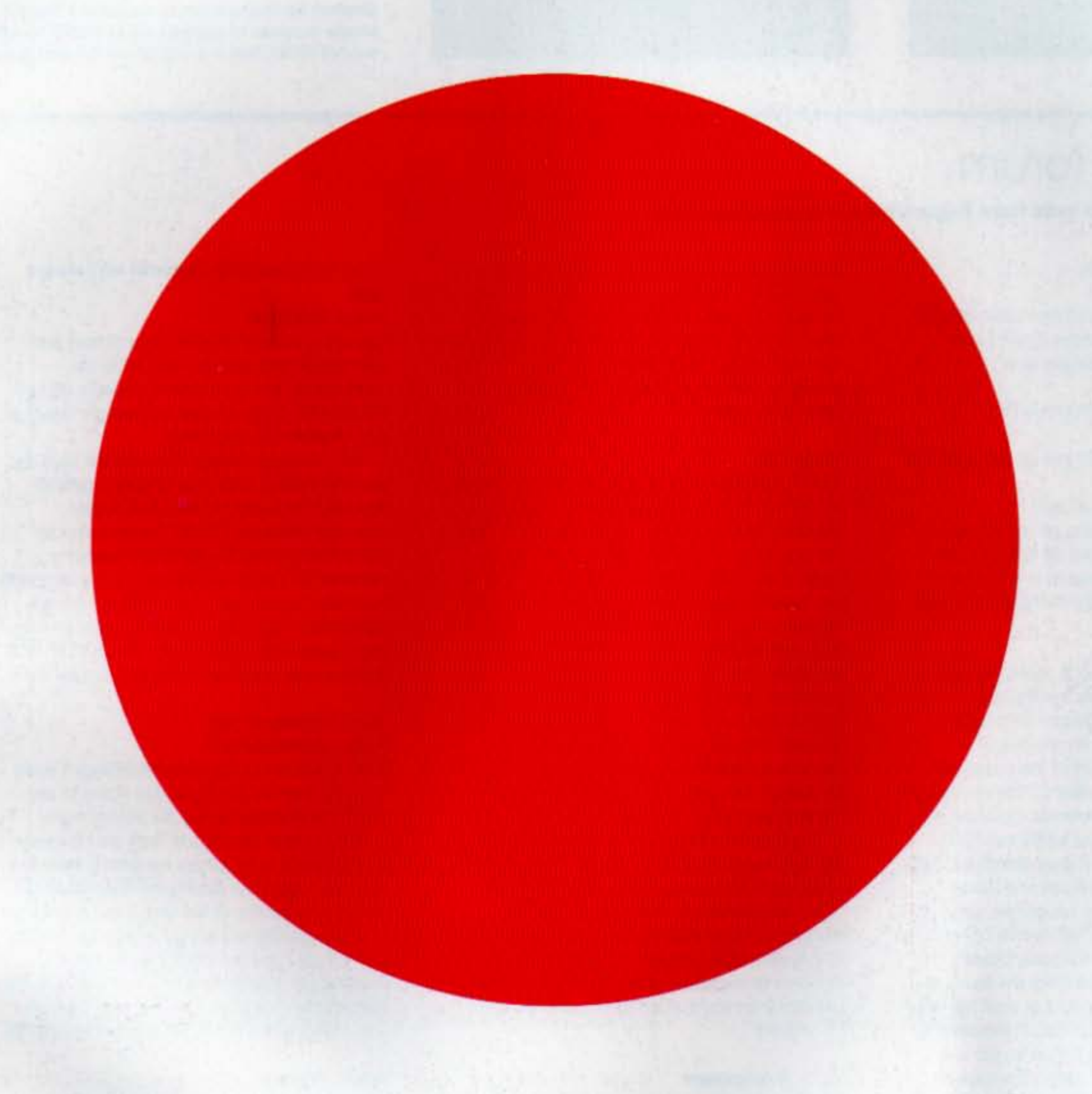
Topic: **In America the customer isn't always right.**
Poster: **mwaawm**
I bought a copy of *Extreme G3* yesterday and was overall quite disappointed. While it's undoubtedly fast, compared to *F-Zero*'s 30 cars the *Extreme G3* races seemed pretty uninspiring, with relatively few opponents.
Not to worry I thought, I'll just take it back and get *FIFA* instead. Well unfortunately America's reputation for customer service is hugely overrated. Here any DVD/CD/video/computer game that has had its cellophane wrapping removed will only be exchanged for the same title. How ridiculous is that? I never thought I'd miss GAME/EB while I was out here but their ten-day return guarantee doesn't seem like so much of a gimmick now but rather a very valuable service.

Topic: **Gaming on Sky**
Poster: **Syntax Error**
I pop in and out of Gamestar and Playjam every now and then on Sky Digital and I have to say that some of these games are proving highly addictive. *Denki Blocks* and *Tetris* are obviously very good but some others are getting there too. Had some good fun playing the *Pong/Arkanoid* hybrid, and the strip poker after 9 isn't bad either.
Obviously this technology is limited to the set top box you have but I think this has great potential and look forward to unearthing other little gems in the near future. Unfortunately, they are now charging you to play virtually all these games.

Poster: **Phatboy**
I don't want to start an argument here, but I always find that attitude wrong. You pay £30 a month for TV programmes, not games. Why should they offer them for free? They cost Sky money to make and run, so why shouldn't they charge for them. It's not exactly expensive, is it?

Edge is looking for talented feature writers. If you have excellent writing skills, an in-depth knowledge and passion for gaming and an abundance of ideas then you could well be the right person. Strong industry contacts would be a bonus but enthusiasm, reliability and vision are more essential qualities. Applicants should send samples of work and five comprehensive feature ideas, along with a full CV and covering letter, to:
Mark Walbank, Edge, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW.

Next month



A special themed issue.

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2. 5600 TEZ
3. 4550 DAZ
4. 2960 ZAZ
5. 2510 STE
6. 2180 MAC
7. 1830 SEJ
8. 1560 POW
9. 1360 MAW
10. 20 CAX

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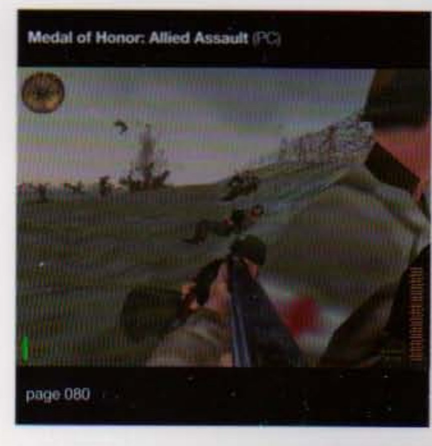
Turok Evolution (Xbox, PS2, GC)

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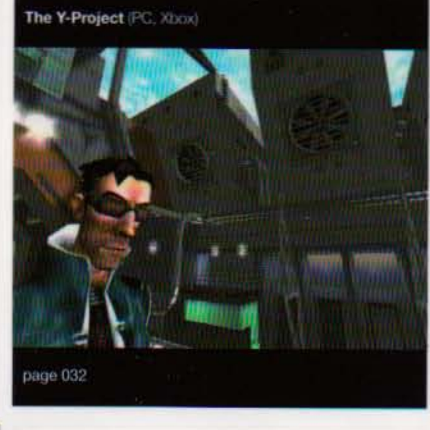
Battle Hoshin (GameCube)

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Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (PC)

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The Y-Project (PC, Xbox)

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V-Rally 3 (GBA)

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